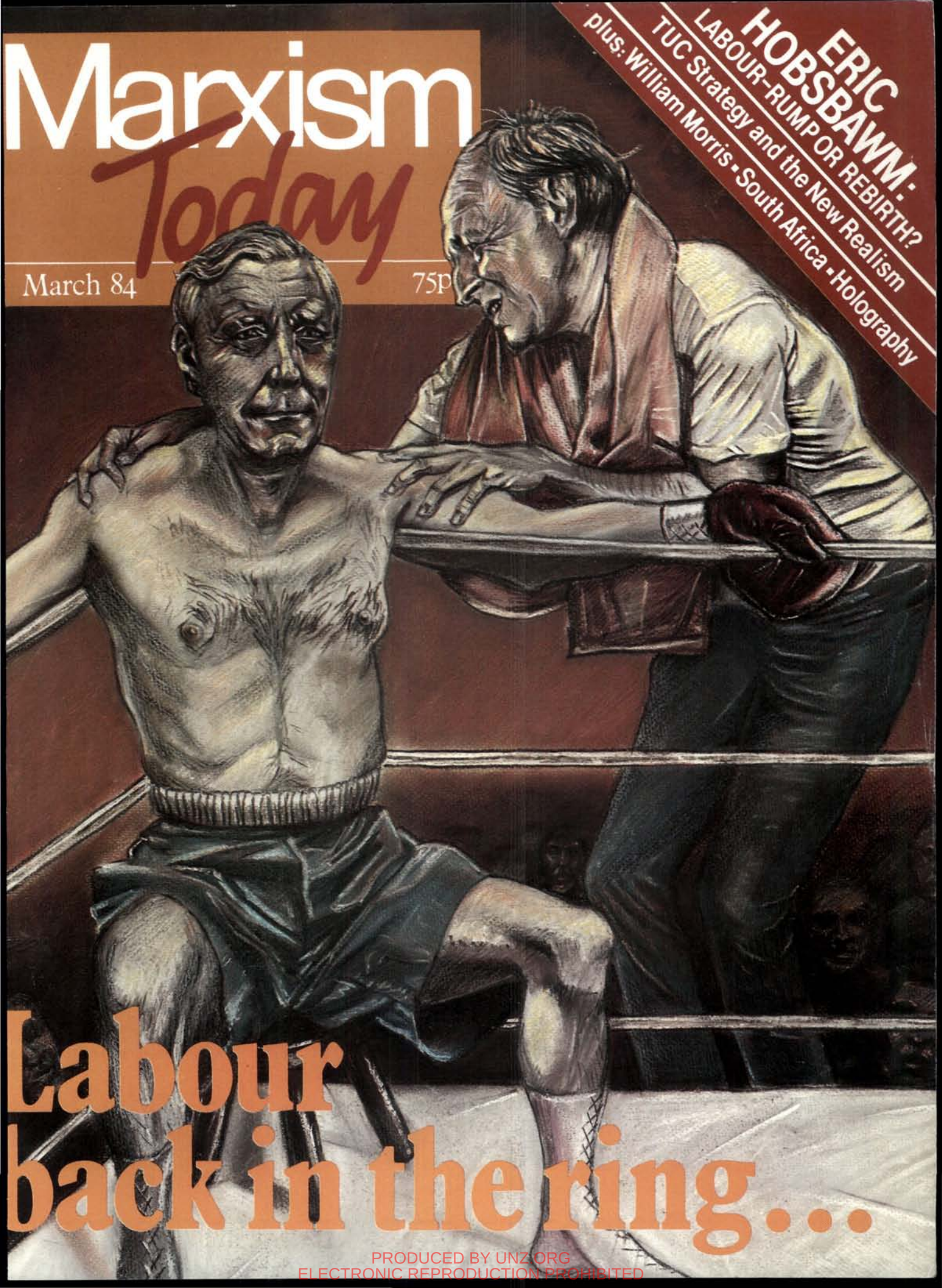
Marxism Today

March 84 75p

ERIC HOBSBAWM: LABOUR-RUMP OR REBIRTH?

TUC Strategy and the New Realism

plus: William Morris • South Africa • Holography



Labour back in the ring...

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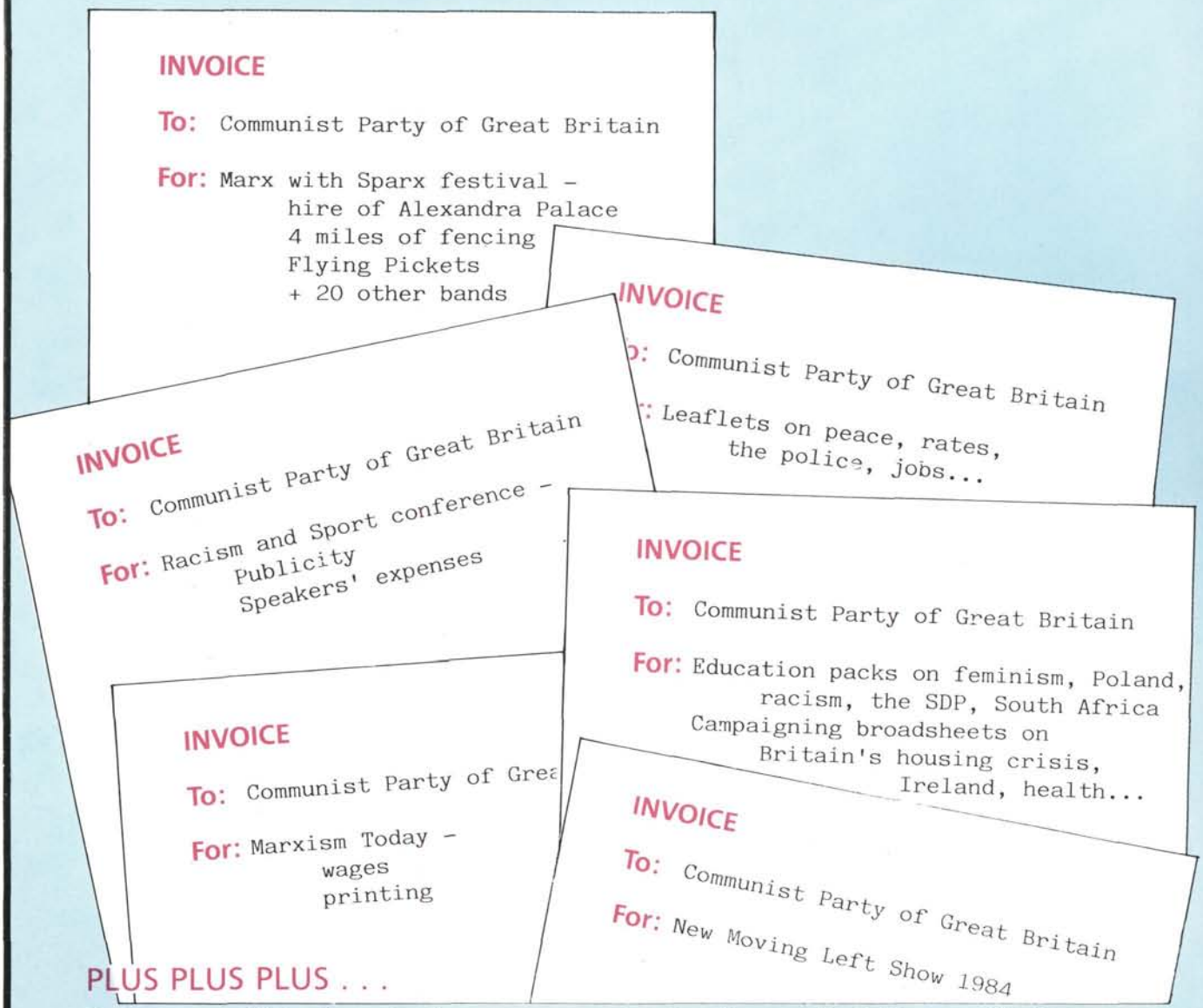

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Marxism

Theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party

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DISTRIBUTION
Newsagents: Punch Distribution Services 23-27 Tudor Street, London EC4Y 0HR
Subscriptions and bookshops:
Central Books Ltd, 14 The Leathermarket London SE1 3ER

SUBSCRIPTION RATES for one year
Inland: individuals £9, students £7, institutions £12
Overseas: individuals £12, institutions £15

The editor welcomes contributions for publication in the journal. Further details if required from the editorial office. Please send SAE if you want an acknowledgement or manuscript returned.
The views expressed by authors are personal and not necessarily those of the editor or editorial board.

DESIGN Sue Lamble
TYPESET by Verbatim Graphics Ltd
PRINTED by Farleigh Press Ltd (TU) Watford, Herts

COVER DESIGN: Lee Robinson with Peter Hammarling and Paul Webster.
COVER ILLUSTRATION: Christopher Sharrock

ISSN 0026-4118
Published by the Communist Party
16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY

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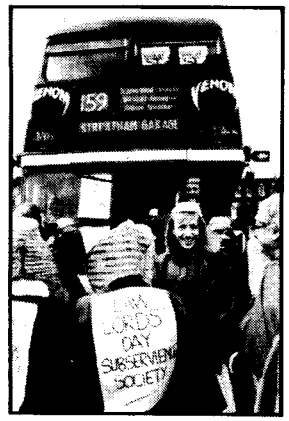

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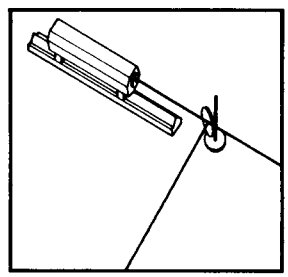

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SOUTH AFRICA'S DILEMMA

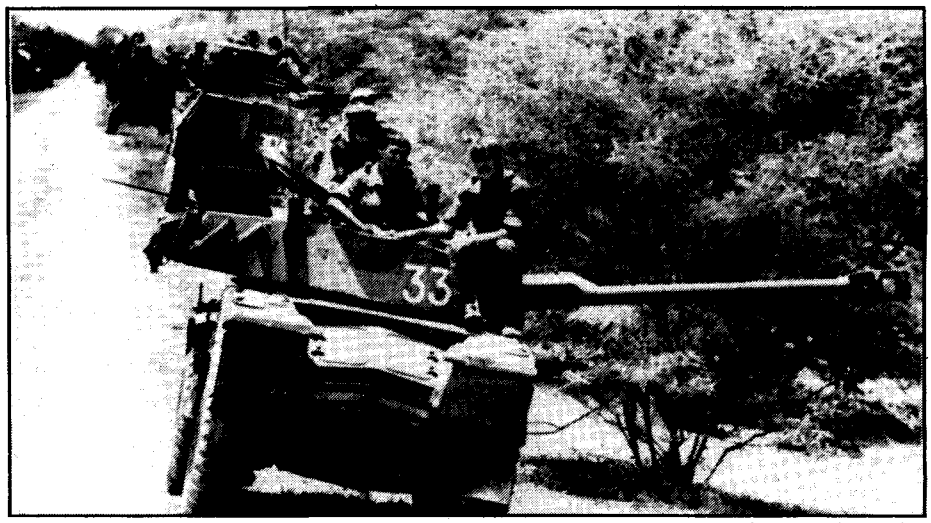
South Africa's powerful disinformation machine has scored some notable hits recently. The big year-end offensive in Angola and subsequent withdrawal to previous positions was projected as a successful pre-emptive strike against SWAPO. The talks with Mozambique which began in Swaziland in December and continued in Pretoria and Maputo in January were presented as a diplomatic victory against an awkward neighbour, hitherto defiant, now compliant.

Both depictions tell more about the effectiveness of South African government influence over the international media than they do about events on the ground. In southern Angola, the South African military have occupied a salient of territory roughly equal in size to the home counties since August 1981. They had exploited this foothold during 1982 to promote Unita probes up the eastern flank of the country towards the north-east, and towards the central highlands. Some initial Unita successes forced the Angolan government to streamline the organisation of defence through the creation of regional military councils, and back it up with better logistics and stronger, better integrated local militia units. In the second half of 1983 the Angolan army, FAPLA, began to roll back the more advanced Unita units, breaking up many of them and regaining the initiative. The big South African push that began in early December 1983 — the fifth such offensive since 1975 — was an attempt to wrest back the initiative by extending the existing salient northwards some 100km deeper into Angolan territory. But the effort to take four key small towns foundered on fierce resistance and South Africans withdrew after taking heavier casualties than at any time since their first attempt to reach Luanda just after Angola's independence in 1975.

Pretoria's reverses on the battlefield have been parallelled by diplomatic setbacks over Namibia. Encouraged in its intransigence over Namibian independence by the Reagan administration's insistence on linking this issue with the presence of Cuban troops in Angola, Pretoria has dug in its heels and refused to implement UN Security Council resolution 435 which defines the transition to independence. The price for this sit-tight policy was paid when France precipitated the collapse of the 5-member Contact Group by suspending its participation, thus bringing to an end seven years of Western diplomatic cover for Pretoria and of coordinated pressure on SWAPO and Angola to come to terms with South African demands. The Soviet Union, hitherto distanced from the diplomatic manoeuvring over Namibia by the existence of the Contact Group, chose this moment to step in and give South Africa a blunt warning that its aggression would meet a stiff rebuff. The follow-up in January, when a joint meeting of Soviet, Cuban and Angolan leaders decided on increased military aid to Angola, underlined the seriousness of the Soviet intervention, unprecedented in the nearly 18 years of Namibia's armed struggle against the South African occupation.

A Security Council vote in December demonstrated Pretoria's growing isolation: only the US abstained in a vote demanding South Africa's withdrawal from Angola and compliance with UN resolutions on Namibia. Attempts to reverse this trend followed in quick succession: a cease-fire offer (which turned out to be phoney since it was accompanied by a new military offensive and required SWAPO and the Cubans to suspend operations); a declaration of willingness to talk direct to SWAPO, and a dialogue with Angola conducted in Cape Verde through US mediation. None of this, however, could disguise the strains on the apartheid regime's Western alliance which the continuing impasse was generating. All the Reagan administration's feverish diplomatic activity throughout 1983 had produced was a more exposed profile for the crucial Pretoria-Washington nexus, and a growing realisation that the 'linkage' issue had sunk the Contact Group and isolated the US from France, West Germany, and to a lesser extent, even the Thatcher government in Britain.

On its eastern flank, Pretoria's undeclared war against Mozambique suffered comparable reverses during 1983. The South African military's surrogate force, the MNR, originally conceived by Rhodesian intelligence, and forged out of the numerous terror squads created by the Portuguese in the last phase of the colonial war, had peaked in 1982. Rumours of an impending collapse had flooded the capital Maputo, and the Frelimo party had been forced to postpone its 5-yearly congress by a year. With the party springing to life with renewed vigour in the deep-going public discussions that led up to a highly successful fourth congress last April, the government prioritised defence and took the offensive. Military campaigns broke the back of MNR organisation in the southern provinces of Gaza (Dec/Jan 82/83) and Inhambane (Aug-Oct 83) leading to the capture or surrender of some 3,000 persons and the closure of all the key bases in these areas. In strategic terms, this set-back more than outweighed the gain of an easy entry by the MNR into the central province of Zambezia, using Malawi as the springboard.



South African armoured column pauses near Evale, 55 miles inside Angola, after campaign against Black nationalist guerillas.

South Africa's readiness to talk to Mozambique by the end of 1983 can therefore be seen as a switch in tactics — attempting to achieve by diplomatic pressure and economic leverage what destabilisation via the MNR had not yet produced, principally abandonment of support for the ANC and a softer line on apartheid. But President Machel specifically reaffirmed Mozambique's commitment to the ANC, showed no inclination to meet Prime Minister Botha, eschewed the US's and Portugal's attempts to act as intermediaries, and signalled his distrust by announcing on the eve of the January

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meetings a major political and organisational strengthening of Mozambique's armed forces.

Frelimo's military thrust was accompanied by a no less successful diplomatic push, aimed at consolidating relations with the socialist countries, winning friends and influencing governments in Western Europe, and thawing relations with the United States which had fallen near zero after Mozambique's expulsion of CIA agents in March 1981. Although not rewarded by significant new investment commitments except from France, or food aid appropriate to the needs created by the severe drought, this diplomatic campaign served to raise awareness of the dangers of South African agression against the front line states. When Foreign Minister Pik Botha followed President Machel to Western Europe he was disconcerted to find a cooler attitude towards his government, and little tangible political benefit to be gained from the much-publicised constitutional reforms, or the predictable support for them in the whites-only referendum.

Ironically, the reform operation, always essentially cosmetic and masking a consolidation of white power under a new presidential-type system, has backfired on the apartheid regime. Designed with divide-and-rule motives, it has actually exacerbated the slow-burning crisis of white rule by uniting the extra-parliamentary opposition to a degree virtually unknown in the long history of liberation struggle in South Africa, at any rate since at least the late 1950s. The birth of the UDF (United Democratic Front) in 1983 signified the drawing together, on the basis of open support or tacit sympathy for the ideas of the ANC's programme, the Freedom Charter, of the four main strands in the popular resistance to white domination in the period since the 1976 Soweto uprising: the churches and religious groupings, community and urban civic political groups, the youth and student militants, and the independent trade union movement. Although problems remain as regards the latter, both as to its internal cohesion and as to its integration into a united front of action against the government's reforms, the fact is that the regime has never before faced, at one and the same time, such a battery of pressures, ranging over the open mass campaign spearheaded by the UDF, the increasing organisational strength and defiance of the black working class, more widespread and effective sabotage and armed resistance than hitherto, and an extraordinarily determined local revolt in the East London/Ciskei area sustained in the teeth of savage repression. This situation has also promoted the isolation of those in the Indian and Coloured communities, and those like Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, who have effectively aligned themselves with Pretoria while proclaimingthe sincerity of their anti-apartheid convictions.

It is primarily the intensity of this internal conflict, unremitting and potentially explosive, that generates the ferocity of South Africa's undeclared war against its neighbours. Unable to resolve the fundamental problem of the very existence of the apartheid system, the regime turns outward bent on making Southern Africa safe for white South Africa. Combining diplomatic, economic and military pressures, and using blackmail and bludgeon rather than the 'carrot and stick' so glibly invoked in many a press commentary, South Africa risks a generalised war in the region, and seems actively to wish to internationalise still further the regional confrontation. Whether Pretoria succeeds in dragging the major Western powers into this cauldron, despite domestic counter-pressures and at the risk of jeopardising influence in the rest of Africa and the Third World, remains to be seen. But so long as sanctions stay off the agenda for South Africa's trading and financial partners, and so long as there is a Reagan administration committed to 'constructive engagement', so long will people in Mozambique and Angola and possibly also in Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have to stand to arms and endure the protracted death pangs of their over-bearing neighbour.

Meanwhile, Mrs Thatcher's government masks its total opposition to economic sanctions and its refusal to close loopholes in the UN embargo on arms to South Africa with condemnation of rugby administrators who refuse to toe the boycott line. With more export promotion trips to South Africa scheduled for this year than ever before, the trade and investment links developed over past decades tie British policy into the apartheid state to a degree that can give little comfort to the leaders of the front line states.

Alan Brookes

DRUGS AND XENOPHOBIA

The drug problem in Britain is getting worse. Just how much worse, and the reasons why are, however, open to question.

Estimates made on the basis of unpublished local studies suggest that the total number of people in Britain and Northern Ireland who used opiates — drugs like heroin, made from the opium poppy, and synthetic opiate-like pharmaceuticals — *regularly* (and were to some extent dependent) at some stage during 1982 was of the order of 40,000. A larger number would have been less heavily involved with a variety of illegal drugs — not only opiates, but also injected ground-up pills such as barbiturates, and sedative, tranquilliser or stimulant pills (like amphetamines) taken by mouth. 'Multi-drug use', as it is called, has been quite a consistent feature of the drug scene: but street-level observers are increasingly concerned about increases in numbers of people *smoking* heroin in the mistaken belief that this mode of use does not involve a risk of dependency. Since 1982, observers contend, the numbers of drug users have increased, partly due to increases in availability of imported heroin and illicitly diverted pharmaceuticals (synthetic opiates, tranquillisers, sleeping pills, etc) and there are now few areas of Britain where health authorities and police deny there is a problem. The relatively benign cannabis continues to be used to an unknown extent, as the recent Paul McCartney incident reminds us.

One problem in assessing the extent and presumed increase in numbers of drug users is the curious reluctance of researchers working in the area to publish details of how they have arrived at their estimates. Government publications refer to a DHSS-supplied formula based on research that has never been published and hence made properly available for scientific scrutiny and debate.

But perhaps a more serious problem is the obsession with 'numbers'. The severity or character of a drug problem is not simply a matter of numbers, and a more accurate head-count would leave us with few clues about how to respond constructively. What is more important is a realistic understanding of what *sort* of problem it is. Unfortunately for the development of policy and welfare practice in this area, the explanations of the problem currently being put forward in progressive circles are marred by a combination of xenophobia approaching racism, and nostalgic sentimentality that tries to interpret 1980s drug use in terms of concepts and images that were popularised in the 1960s.

Looking first at the xenophobic aspect of current explanations we find that academic and lay commentators characteristically attribute increases in drug use to assumed

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increases in international supply of opiate drugs (supply-push model of the economy). As Paul Brown put it in the first of three full-page spreads on 'A Generation on the main line to tragedy' in the *Guardian* this January, 'Britain's bad luck stems from the sources of supply. In the late 1970s British hospitality to the middle classes fleeing Iran after the revolution meant that we also received huge quantities of heroin. It was the easiest way of moving money out of Iran. The second supply boom, which is worsening all the time, originates in Pakistan — from the Afghan border'. This sort of explanation has long been favoured by Western commentators, and has quite frequently been backed up in a material way by aid and 'development' programmes that impose conditions including eradication of cultivation of plant drugs. Acknowledged problems faced by this 'supply-side' approach to drug prevention include the difficulty of eradicating a profitable crop in poor countries, and the fact that traffickers can always switch to a new country or region if their existing source dries up.

But there is an even deeper problem, as Third World commentators have pointed out to Western agencies. The obvious shortcoming of the supply-side explanation of drug use is its neglect of the domestic (UK) factors that encourage the international trade in plant drugs like opium and its derivatives, and also encourage the illicit diversion of synthetic opiate-like drugs from pharmaceutical sources. It's very easy to blame Iranians, Pakistanis and other foreigners. Such apportioning of blame has a long, dishonourable and racist history focusing upon Chinese, Mexicans, Afro-Caribbeans etc, thereby inverting the longer-standing history of European drug trafficking, starting with the Opium Wars and continuing with modern pharmaceuticals.

But the fact is that, ever since cash-cropping was introduced into Third World countries, there always has been a multiplicity of sources of potential drug cultivation and supply, waiting upon demand from industrialised and urban areas.

Let us look, then, at the question of the demand for drugs. Popular mythology has it that the demand for drugs in general, and for heroin in particular, is generated by a desire to 'escape' pressing personal and social pressures and problems. As a drug worker quoted in the *Guardian* article put it, 'Heroin is the drug of the 80s, it blocks out the pain and the hopelessness of unemployment and the bleakness of the future'. This model of the problem— social conditions breed casualties, and casualties turn to drugs, gaining short-term relief at the cost of longer-term pain and pathology — is borrowed from the 1960s. As Jock Young described it many years ago, it suggests a 'nemesis effect'. It gained adherence in a period in which the Keynesian dream of postwar reconstruction foundered on a more disciplinary spirit which insisted that unearned consumption and pleasure must always end in tragedy. But does this sentiment give us an understanding of drug use in the 1980s?

Unemployment and recession is certainly the context surrounding much drug use today. But not all people respond to unemployment (or the prospect of unemployment) by saying 'ain't it terrible, I give up' and retreating into a timeless and infantile void of intoxication or into some other form of passive, deviant consumption. For many people — depending upon the material and cultural resources available to them — unemployment invites an active search for alternative, opportunistic and entrepreneurial ways of passing time, meeting people and 'making out' through the buying, selling and exchange of goods and services. Such activities are sometimes described as constituting the 'informal' (or fringe) economy. It is as *one aspect* (or one sector) of the informal economy and its attendant cultures that we can understand styles of involvement with drugs today.

Recent studies of the informal economy highlight a range of activities that are both economic and social, and yet outside the formal boundaries of the wage economy. Small scale production and provision of a range of services — renovation and repair, odd-jobs and cleaning, trading in goods that 'fell off the back of a lorry', 'cash-in-hand', fetching and carrying jobs, provision of sexual and other services — these continue and many expand in a recession, as people search for alternative sources of income, and move partially into barter and exchange. This highly entrepreneurial, small-business activity is not simply financially motivated though that is a major consideration. The appeal is also 'political' — making out in the market economy, being independent, enjoying the rewards — and social — having a framework within which to meet and meaningfully interact with other people. It is through the expansion of these aspects of the informal economy that recession and unemployment have been converted into an increase in the demand for a *variety* of goods and services, including plant-based and synthetic drugs.

Far from being the 'helpless victims' of international drug trafficking and supply, urban drug users are generally active participants in an economy and culture of exchange of drugs and other goods and services. It is difficult to see how this aspect of the market economy and its attendant cultural practices could be separated from the larger process of social recomposition and economic restructuring upon which Britain has for some years been embarked.

To blame foreigners for side-effects of our own economic and social policies — for example to blame them for 'Britain's bad luck' in respect of drug problems — hardly reflects reality. Nor, on the domestic front, is it helpful to underwrite stereotypes of a division between economically-minded drug pushers and their drug-consuming 'victims', when the reality is rather more complex. It is this polarised thinking — foreigners versus English, pushers versus users, 'economic' versus 'social problems' — that disables policy and practice in the drugs field.

Nicholas Dorn and Nigel South

MONETARISM IN RETREAT

If monetarism is a religion, then recent weeks have seen a serious outbreak of atheism. Firstly, it seems as if Chancellor Nigel Lawson is close to a dead-end in the implementation of monetarist doctrines. The rate of inflation, the most important symbol of Tory economic 'success', has bottomed out and is on the way back up. There is no possibility of a further drastic deflationary move like the measures of 1980 because the economy is already so depressed. Similarly, Mr Lawson seems to have recognised that no progress towards lower taxation is at present foreseeable; attempts to cut taxes via reductions in public expenditure have proved self-defeating as the tax base itself was weakened.

In both cases there is a clear loss of faith in the underlying dogma of monetarist theory: the assumption, never grounded in convincing evidence, that the market sector of the economy is self-stabilising. If it was, if output and employment in the private sector bounced back to previous levels after a major shock, then it would make some sense to attack inflation with a drastic tightening of credit. As everyone but the most doctrinaire realised that this magic equilibrium was a mirage, reluctance to go on sacrificing real production to monetary targets has grown.

The retreat from monetarist policy recommendations by academics and commentators is a second source of embar-

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rassment for the Government, which remains — in principle at least — wedded to its old strategies. (Conservative opponents of the Government, above all Edward Heath, seem to have sensed a growing unease about monetary policy and chosen this moment to become much more explicit in their criticisms.) One of the most influential advocates of monetarist economics in the past, Samuel Brittan of the *Financial Times* is putting an increasing distance between himself and his previous beliefs. He now puts forward only the most diluted version of the doctrine and seems concerned, above all, to devise monetary policies that will not destabilise real output and employment.

Mr Brittan was originally persuaded to monetarist theory by the writings of Milton Friedman, the Chicago professor who is both the originator and the best-known exponent of monetarist economics today. In a third manifestation of rampant disbelief some very damaging criticisms of Friedman have been published by the Bank of England itself. The document[1] reports on a discussion last October at a meeting of the Bank's Panel of Academic Consultants, a gathering of some twenty senior economists from British universities and the civil service.

Nigel Lawson: close to a dead-end?

The panel met on this occasion to consider a restatement of his position by Friedman and the economic historian Anna Schwarty. About twenty years ago Friedman and Schwarty published a substantial *Monetary History of the US*, very influential in reviving the 'quantity' theory of money which had suffered great damage at the hands of Keynes. The *Monetary History* sought to revise standard Keynesian interpretations of the Great Depression of the 30s by arguing that faulty monetary policy was the main cause of the collapse.

Friedman and Schwarty have now produced another large study of historical trends in money, output, prices and interest rates which, this time, tries to support Friedman's position by drawing on evidence from both the US and the UK.[2] It was the book's use of UK data which was examined in two critical papers presented to the Bank of England's panel.

The main claim in the new Friedman and Schwarty study is the existence of a straightforward causal relationship running from the 'quantity of money' to the general level of prices. In this view, price inflation has one simple cause — too much money in circulation — and one, not too painful, cure — restriction of the 'money supply' by the authorities. The first paper presented at the Bank of England, by Professor AJ Brown of Leeds University, makes a detailed scrutiny of the Friedman/Schwarty data, and finds no good basis for their conclusions in the actual pattern of events. The second paper, by Professor D Hendry and Mr N Ericson of Oxford University. Subjects the Friedman-Schwarty results to a battery of sophisticated statistical tests and, again, finds them wanting in nearly every respect. The claims made by Friedman, it is concluded, are 'without empirical support' and 'devoid of credibility.'

Although it has attracted more comment, the Ericson/Hendry paper is weakened by its reliance on hi-tech econometric procedures. Indeed, the tests it puts forward are so stringent that it is hard to think of an economic study that would have survived them. However, the real damage to Friedman and Schwarty comes from what is between the lines of both papers — they are too decorous to say so explicitly but both clearly suggest that Friedman has fudged the evidence: in order to defend his position the data have been subjected to some weird and wonderful manipulations. Friedman, apparently, has not yet exercised his right of reply to the Brown and Ericson/Hendry critiques — which may indicate some embarrassment at his own less than scrupulous handling of the data. The emperor of Chicago is declared to be without clothes.

However, this is not the first time that the assertions of the monetarists have taken such a blow. There have been many previous examples. For example, Ericson and Hendry themselves refer to the similar conclusions reached by Megnad Desai of the London School of Economics in a book published in 1981[3]. More interesting is the provenance of the present attacks on monetarism and the publicity they have received.

The Bank of England's Panel of Consultants is fully independent and is certainly not an arm of the Bank itself. Nevertheless, there is clearly considerable opposition to monetarist dogma within the Bank, expressed for example in critical studies in the Bank's *Bulletin*. This is partly because it is the Bank of England which is supposed to operate the various targets for money supply devised, under Friedman's influence, at the Treasury. The experience of running the financial system has taught the Bank that the simple monetarist parables linking the money supply to inflation have nothing to do with the actual working of complex financial markets. A real commitment to monetarist doctrine would deprive the Bank of any discretion in its attempt to control the markets for capital and foreign exchange. In particular, the Bank has in recent weeks firmly repulsed Mr Lawson's rather cranky interest in supplementing monetary policy by new controls on the amount of cash — notes and coin — in the system. Similar strains have appeared in the United States where the monetary authorities have resisted the simple Friedmanite formulas which would take away their freedom of manoeuvre.

In fact, much of the present discussion concerns symbols rather than practice because monetary targets *à la Friedman* have not played much role at the Bank of England for some time. The actual figures for money supply have been running well above target for months, but interest rates and the exchange rate for sterling have once again become the main preoccupations of monetary management.

The new readiness to criticise and challenge the Government's direction of economic policy is clearly of some political significance. But criticism of monetarism as an academic theory is a long way from producing agreement on alternatives to monetarism as a practical strategy. Real monetarist policies never had the 'quantity of money' at the centre; the essence of practical monetarism is the acceptance of unemployment as an instrument of economic control. The academic critiques

[1] Monetary trends in the United Kingdom *Bank of England Panel of Academic Consultants*, panel paper no 22, 1983.

[2] M Friedman, A Schwarty *Monetary trends in the United States and the United Kingdom*. 1982.

[3] M Desai *Testing Monetarism* 1981.

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of Friedman are important, but they are only a small part of the vital intellectual battle for effective full employment policies.

John Grahl

SPANISH COMMUNIST PARTY

The formation in January of a new Spanish 'Communist Party' followed closely on the heels of a deeply-divided Congress of the long-established Communist Party of Spain (PCE) held last December. The PCE Congress had been preceded by sharp internal struggles which both contributed to and were exacerbated by heavy losses in membership and severe electoral setbacks.

In considering the problems of Spanish communists it is well to remember that Franco held power longer than Hitler and Mussolini put together. He was never 'defeated' — he died in his bed only about eight years ago; and reaction is still strong in Spain. When the PCE emerged into legality — after nearly 40 years underground — its record in the struggle against fascism ensured it a considerable following. Membership soared (to over 200,000 at one point) and numbers of Communists were elected to Parliament and to local assemblies.

Why has membership since dropped to less than 90,000 and why did the Party suffer such serious setbacks in the elections of October 1982? The political report to Congress from the retiring general secretary, Gerardo Iglesias, suggested a number of reasons, two of which seem particularly important. Iglesias argued that the Party had been too much involved in working inside the 'institutions' (eg, parliamentary manoevering, presumably) at the expense of mass work and the development of mass struggle. This had led to a growing separation of the Party from the masses, as well as to a rift between the Party leadership and the activists.

The other major reason advanced for the setbacks was the conflict between the Party's broad, 'open' political line (Carillo, the previous general secretary, had developed 'Eurocommunist' ideas to an extent that earned him sharp criticism from Soviet communists) and its organisation, structure and style of work, which still showed characteristics carried over from the period of illegality. (During Carillo's period as general secretary many members who had argued for a democratic 'renovation' of the Party's organisation and style of work had either been expelled or had resigned). The report argued that the main weakness had been the 'demobilisation' of the Party's activists as a result of administrative methods of leadership replacing mass work. The Party had 'consumed itself' by the administrative treatment of differences.

Following the election defeats of October 1982, Carillo resigned as general secretary and, with his support, Iglesias — 34 years old, an ex-miner from Asturias — was elected to the position. Yet shortly after, Carillo emerged as a bitter critic of the leadership, and made himself a spokesman at Congress for the 'opposition'. In his speech to Congress he claimed to still hold to the political positions he had advocated in the past; but, comparing those positions with the views he expressed at Congress, one could not help feeling that he had made, if not a U-turn, at least an S-bend!

Debate at Congress ranged over a wide field but there appeared to be three key issues.

First there was controversy — as in so many Communist Parties — over the Party's internationalist stance. Not only the speeches at Congress, but also the warm reception given to foreign fraternal delegates, showed how deeply delegates were concerned to maintain their links with the world communist movement. Whether or not those links were compatible with the rather independent and critical position the PCE has taken at times was a matter of controversy.

Secondly, there were sharp differences over the attitude to be taken to the Socialist government. Both leadership and 'opposition' agreed that the Government was pursuing right-wing policies. Carillo and other critics of the leadership argued for a sharp line of making the PCE a 'radical opposition' to the Government. The leadership argued that this would isolate the Party from masses of workers and from a growing 'left' movement within the Socialist Party itself. The Party's role should be to present positive alternatives to government policies and seek to build broad alliances in struggle for those policies. The extreme Right was still the principal enemy.

Finally, there was intense controversy over the Party itself — over what sort of Party it should aim to be. The leadership argued for a very 'broad' approach that could win back to the Party thousands who had left it, and make new recruits, on no other terms than acceptance of the decisions of Congress. Critics argued that what was proposed meant a move away from a proletarian party based on Marxism-Leninism. Particularly controversy was aroused by Iglesias' argument that, in the conditions of Spain, a mass party must be a 'lay' party, not a 'doctrinal' party — 'neither faith nor atheism are a motive for militancy'; the Party, and Marxism, could only be enriched by the admission of a wide range of cultural attitudes and traditions.

In the event the leadership won the vote — but only just. A wide-ranging political report had to be voted for or against on a 'take-it-or-leave-it' basis with no amendment possible (an arrangement which seems bound to maximise opposition). It was carried by 386 votes to 376 against, with 25 abstentions. The leadership did rather better on some subsequent votes on particular issues of policy, and the central Committee election gave Iglesias and the retiring leadership a clear majority of 2 or 3 to 1 over Carillo and other critics.

Deep as were the divisions at Congress, what was also clear was the genuine emotional feeling of the great majority of delegates for party unity. How many of them — and how many of the members they represented — would join the new party it is impossible to say. Some — Carillo, for example — have been so much associated with 'Eurocommunism' that it is difficult to conceive of them joining, or being accepted into, a new party with a very different sense of political direction. I think, too, that the position of Dolores Ibarruri ('La Pasionaria') may be of some influence. Now well into her 80s, she sat on the platform throughout Congress and was greeted with unmistakable warmth, love and respect by the whole Congress. More than any other personality, she symbolises the continuity of the Party from its historic struggles of the 30s through to the present day. On all major issues she voted with Iglesias and the leadership majority; and following the Central Committee election she was unanimously elected party president (Iglesias was re-elected general secretary but not unanimously).

According to press reports, a delegation from the Soviet Communist Party was present at the foundation meeting in January of the new party, which has, it seems, declared war on 'Eurocommunism' in the name of 'Marxism-Leninism'. A delegation from the CPSU had also been present at the PCE Congress in December; it was very warmly received and, in common with the many other foreign delegations, a message of greetings was published in *Mundo Obrero*. One can understand why the PCE leadership should feel that CPSU representation at the foundation meeting of a rival body was hardly a fraternal act!

Dave Priscott

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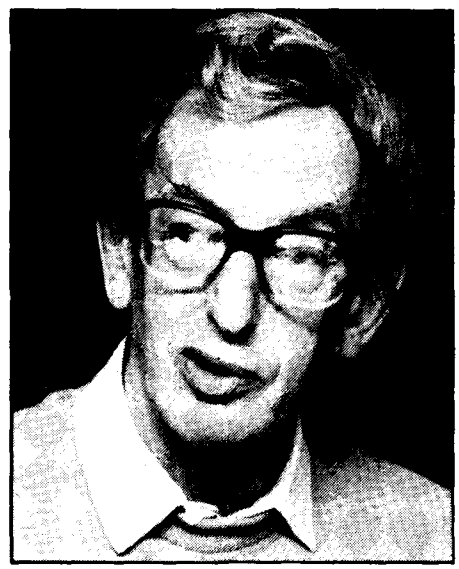
Eric Hobsbawm's 'Labour's Lost Millions' which we published last October, has led to a major debate in our columns and elsewhere. In this article, he responds to the argument.

LABOUR: Rump or Rebirth?

Eric Hobsbawm



MARXISTS AND OTHER left-wing socialists — for many of them can hardly be regarded as Marxists, even when, as today, they advertise themselves as such — have never been happy about the Labour Party. Before 1918 it did not claim to be socialist at all. Since then it has, but many will agree that 'it is reasonable to see (labourism) as an ideology of social reform, within the framework of capitalism, with no serious ambitions of transcending that framework, whatever ritual obeisances to 'socialism' might be performed by party leaders on suitable occasions.' (R Miliband in *Socialist Register* 1983 p 109). Or, to be more polite, that what most Labour leaders have meant by 'socialism' is rather different from what is in the minds of socialists.

Consequently the Left has, historically, had two views about the Labour Party. Some have written it off and attempted, from time to time, to form another, truly socialist, party of the working class in competition with it. This appears still to be the position of some Marxist groups such as the WRP and SWP, and was that of independent socialists like Miliband who argued that the 'hope of the Left to transform the Labour Party . . . was illusory, and that, far from representing a short cut to the creation of a mass socialist party in Britain (which has never existed), it was in fact a dead end in which British socialists had been trapped for many decades — in fact since the Labour Party came into being.' (*ibid* 116)

History has shown this to be a non-starter. None of the organisations which have followed this line between 1900 and 1983, from the Social Democratic Federation via the Communist Party at some periods of its history and the ILP in the 1930s, has got anywhere, nor do the present advocates of an independent socialist/marxist mass party look promising. In Britain there has been only one genuine mass party of the Left, based on the working class and its movement, the Labour Party.

Most socialists, and today the great majority of Marxists, have accepted this as a fact of life. Like it or not, the future of socialism is through the Labour Party. This has been the basis of Communist Party policy since its programme *The British Road to Socialism* in the early 1950s, and was implicit in its policy since the middle 1930s. Other Marxists have moved into the Labour Party either as individuals or, like the Militant Tendency, as collective 'entrists', thus incidentally making the Communist Party's long-held hope of winning collective and open affiliation to the Labour Party difficult to the point of impracticability. A great body of socialists have always regarded the Labour Party as their natural home and operated as a Left within it.

A truly socialist mass party

However, there is a fundamental distinction within this body of Labour-oriented socialists, and it lies at the root of the arguments about the Forward March of Labour, which have lately clustered around my article 'Labour's Lost Millions' in *Marxism Today* Oct 1983, being conducted with much passion and some bad temper. Some on the Left — probably a majority — believe that the time has come when the Labour Party itself can be transformed into the truly socialist mass party which we would all prefer. Their scenario — to quote the admirably lucid Ralph Miliband again — is

> 'the continuation of the struggles in which the Left has been engaged, with the purpose of achieving predominance and turning the Labour Party into a socialist party free from the constriction hitherto imposed on it by its leaders. It must be presumed that many leading figures in the Labour Party would then want to leave it and seek political homes elsewhere . . . In fact it would be essential that such people *should* leave the Labour Party, for just as the Left makes life difficult for a leadership which is opposed to it, so could determined Right and Centre parliamentarians make life difficult for a party in which the Left had acquired predominance.' (p 116)

The Labour Party might lose some members but would gain others. It might even lose unions which wished to disaffiliate from a party that went beyond labourism, but only in some cases. (p 116)

The other view — which I share — holds that this is a dangerous day-dream. Certainly the future lies in a Labour Party which moves to the left, not only under the influence of the socialists within and outside it, but because its members and supporters recognise the need for it to do so — just as formerly Liberal and non-political Labour supporters came to see themselves as socialists earlier this century. But Marxists must begin by taking the Labour Party as it has actually come into

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being and developed to be the mass party of the British Left. In the first place, it has not developed as an ideologically homogeneous or unified party, but as a broad class and progressive front, containing a wide range of views from the Centre to the revolutionary Left. In fact, Lenin (whose *'Leftwing Communism, an Infantile Disorder'* repays careful reading even today), stressed 'the unique character of the British Labour Party the very structure of which is so unlike the ordinary political party on the continent'.[1]

Workers as well as leaders

In the second place, and even more to the point, it has unfortunately *never* been true that the only thing which has prevented the Labour Party from being the party of our dreams, was the 'constriction hitherto imposed on it by its leaders'. The British workers, even the workers politically advanced enough to join a party committed to socialism and to defend its commitment against the Gaitskellite attacks on 'Clause IV', were never an army of left-wing socialists held back only by blind loyalty to right-wing leaders who betrayed their faith at every opportunity, and the millions of Labour voters fitted this image even less. They have indeed often been misled and betrayed by those they trusted — not least by Attlee and Bevin who committed them to a cold-war policy they would certainly not have chosen in 1945-7 and British nuclear weapons they would not have wanted, had they known about them. They have certainly often been disappointed by their party — more than ever since the disastrous 1960s — and by many of its

Like it or not, the future of socialism is through the Labour Party

leaders. They have, bitterly, seen a succession of men and women whom they trusted as people devoted to their cause, abandon them for the anti-Labour parties or revealed as ambitious or money-hungry careerists. But, by and large, they have been content with a 'labourism' which stood for something much more modest than socialism in practice, even if it held out the hope of a socialist society. That is still the case.

To accept this in not opportunism, but realism. Still less does it mean that the Labour Party cannot move to the left. Indeed, it has done so to a notable extent since the days of Gaitskell and Wilson. What it does mean is that the political evolution of the party will fail, if it takes place without considering the masses, without whose support it is lost. To quote Lenin again: 'Change is brought about by the political experience of the masses; never is it brought about by propaganda alone. 'To march forward without compromise, without turning from the path' — if this is said by an obviously impotent minority of the workers . . . then the slogan is obviously mistaken. It is like 10,000 soldiers going into battle against 50,000 enemy soldiers — when it would be wise to 'stop', to 'turn from the road' and even 'enter into a compromise' in order to gain time until the arrival of the reinforcements of 100,000.'[2]

FACING UP TO THE CRISIS

How 'impotent' is the movement today? How fundamental are the changes it needs to undertake? Where must it look for its 'reinforcements'? The debate on my article has concentrated on the third question, because, after the June 1983 elections, not even the most blinkered of sectarians were prepared to claim in public that Labour had not suffered a disastrous defeat or that nothing was wrong with the conduct of the party which finished four years of Thatcherism by losing a fifth of its supporters. Yet the debate shows that in fact the depth of Labour's crisis has not sunk in. People like me, say some, are just indulging in pessimism and 'the Left's current passion for slinging mud at itself' (Massey, Segal and Wainwright in *New Socialist* Jan-Feb 1984). They echo, say others, the Labour Centre and Right of the 1950s, which thought there was no future for a working class-based party, and look how wrong they were (Westergaard in *New Socialist Jan-Feb 1984, Miliband in Socialist Register* 1983, pp 104-5). Hobsbawm can only think that Labour's forward march has been reversed, because he overlooks the 'wonderful, painful, indispensable, transition from mere Labourism to Socialism' which has been taking place within the Labour Party, though it is not yet complete (Royden Harrison in *Labour Herald* Oct 28 1983), a statement which reminds me of the oarsmen in a boat which is being swept towards the rapids who congratulate themselves, no doubt correctly on rowing much better than they had ever done before.

A different working class

As for the changes which have to be made, everybody agrees in principle that there is a lot to be done. Yet in practice it is denied that the profound changes in the social and economic structure and situation of Britain since the 1950s, to which I have tried to draw attention for the past five years, make a corresponding re-thinking of the movement's political approach necessary. It is argued that the 'working class', the traditional base of the party, is not declining, though the decline of 'the manual working class based on heavy engineering, the mines, shipyards, the docks etc,' is not denied. 'It is not true to say the working class has overall diminished. It is a different working class' (Eric Heffer *Marxism Today* Dec 83). 'The working class is the overwhelming majority of the population' (*Socialist Worker* 15 Oct 83: 'Eric Hobsbawm: Guru on the wrong road') It is obviously true that the bulk of the population of working age, insofar as they are not unemployed, are in one way or another employed for wages/salaries, though it would be interesting to penetrate the statistically undocumented and almost certainly growing cloud of the 'black' or 'unofficial' economy, in which the differ-

the party which finished four years of Thatcherism by losing a fifth of its supporters

ence between bosses, workers and what historians of the Victorian era call 'penny capitalism' are much less clear-cut. If a study of the changes within the working class aims to discover the new ways of mobilising this mixture of old and new, but in all cases transformed, sections of the employed, then it is useful. Westergaard, who agrees that 'a labour movement dedicated to radical and constructive opposition to inequality can no longer hope to swing a majority behind it by appealing to class loyalties', has done a very good job of this kind in his 'Class of '84' (New Socialist Jan-Feb 1984). But if it merely asserts that the transformation of the working class proves that we should go plugging on in the old way, then it is not helpful. Of course there is also the view, recently expressed by Tony Benn, that 'all this analysis of a fundamental change which means that everything is different is designed to demoralise and defeat', (*City Limits* Jan 20-26 1984) which I record without comment.

The question arises why, if the Labour Party has basically been on the right lines (give or take a failure here and there) it suffered such a spectacular defeat in June 1983. And why those who believed it was,

[1]Lenin *Selected Works* Vol X p131.
[2]Lenin *Selected Works* Vol X p127.

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did not predict what was going to happen, as the realists did, being labelled as 'pessimists' for having been patently right. Or, for that matter, why all the participants in this debate are arguing so furiously about the future of Labour.

Feminism

I need say little about contributors who divert attention from the problems at issue by criticising me for not discussing the problems of the Communist Party and the revolutionary Left (Eric Heffer in *Marxism Today* Dec 1983, Royden Harrison in *Labour Herald* Oct 28 1983) or for a bias against women (Anna Coote, *Marxism Today* Jan 1984, Doreen Massey, Lynne Segal, Hilary Wainwright, *New Socialist* Jan-Feb 1984). As for the question of feminism, what was said on the subject in 'Labour's Lost Millions' can only be read as meaning that the women's movement and the problem of mobilising women can

> I am probably now known . . . simply as 'the man who wants a coalition of Labour and the SDP/Liberal Alliance'

not be treated as a mere sub-department of the working-class struggle, but that women and their movement are forces in their own right. It is in no sense anti-feminist. No doubt 'there may be a problem involved in appealing to the interests of women and men at the same time' (Coote), though in the past labour movements have nevertheless succeeded in appealing to both with fair success. (In the 1930s a consistent 41-42% of the individual members of the Labour Party were women.)

As socialists we simply have no option but to believe as a minimum that socialism is consistent with the aspirations of women, as Tricia Davis obviously does in the important article to which Coote rightly draws attention. (Feminism is Dead? Long Live Feminism' *Marxism Today* Oct 1983). If we thought it could not satisfy half the human race, how could we be socialists? In the meantime the task is enormous: 72% of voting women in June 1983 chose Alliance and the Tories, whose feminist record is hardly impressive. As for my article, I have genuine difficulty in understanding how it can be read as an example of male bias, or part of a 'Great *Male* Moving Right Show', even assuming it recommends a move to the right, which it does not. It is, of course, undeniable that, for reasons beyond my control, it is written by a man.

Up-dated Popular Front

The Communist Party was not the subject of 'Labour's Lost Millions', though its problems are inseparable from the prospects of Labour, as are those of the rest of the socialist Left, Marxist or not. However, critics are right in pointing out that the views expressed about Labour's future prospects by me and others in *Marxism Today* are in a way, 'an up-to-date version of the Poplar Front' (Heffer) and that, in my own case, 'Popular Frontism, in one form or another (has) characterise(d) his politics over five decades' (Norah Carlin and Ian Birchall, 'Kinnock's Favourite Marxist: Eric Hobsbawm and the Working Class' *International Socialism* 21, autumn 1983 p 90). This is not only the nostalgia of someone formed in the anti-fascist 1930s for the period which, after all, achieved the greatest advances of the Left in Europe since the Russian Revolution, ranging from Labour triumph in Britain to, in some countries, autonomous social revolutions. It is because we were able to discover in practice how right Dimitrov was to tell us:

> 'We want to find a common *language* with the broadest masses for the purpose of struggling against the class enemy, to find ways of finally overcoming *the isolation of the revolutionary vanguard* from the masses of the proletariat and all working people, as well as overcoming the fatal *isolation of the working class itself* from its natural allies in the struggle against the bourgeoisie, against fascism.' (G Dimitrov, *Selected Speeches and Articles,* London 1951, p 113)

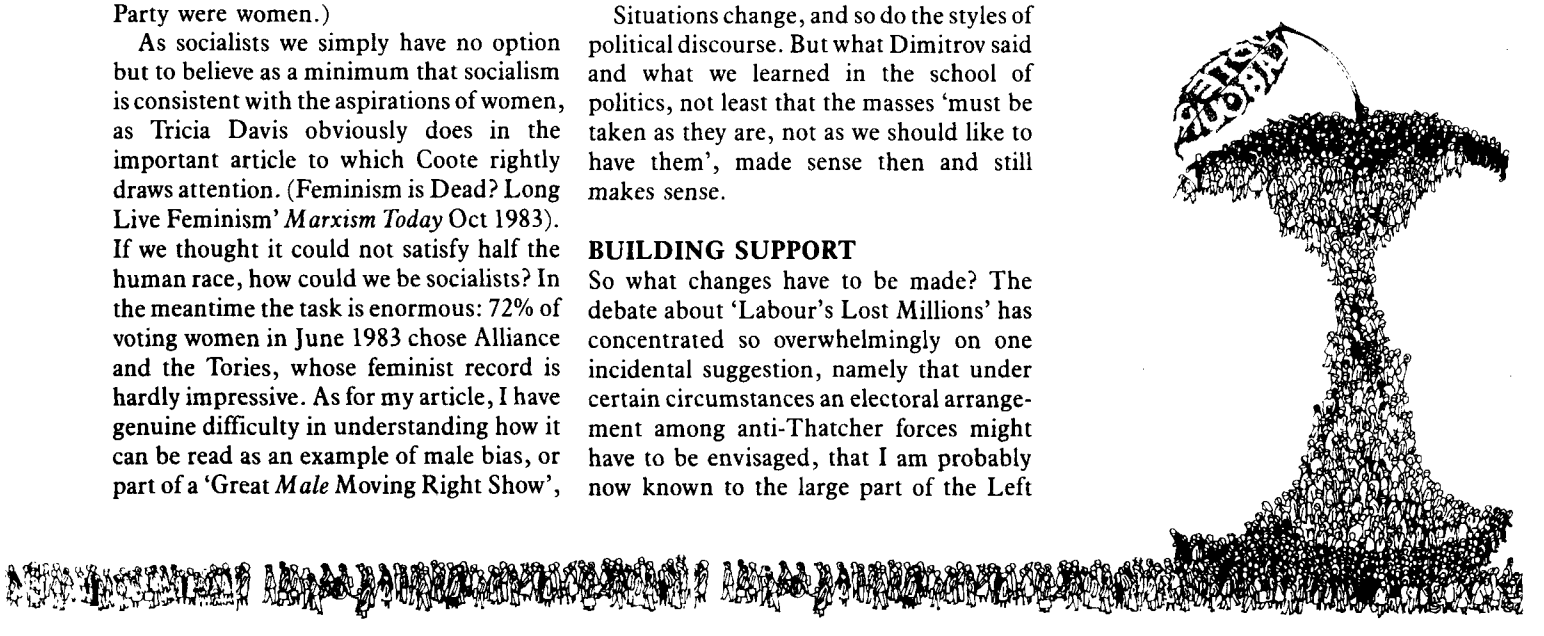
Situations change, and so do the styles of political discourse. But what Dimitrov said and what we learned in the school of politics, not least that the masses 'must be taken as they are, not as we should like to have them', made sense then and still makes sense.

BUILDING SUPPORT

So what changes have to be made? The debate about 'Labour's Lost Millions' has concentrated so overwhelmingly on one incidental suggestion, namely that under certain circumstances an electoral arrangement among anti-Thatcher forces might have to be envisaged, that I am probably now known to the large part of the Left which has never read a word of *Marxism Today* simply as 'the man who wants a coalition of Labour and the Liberal/SDP Alliance.' Just to have it on the record, let me say, once again, that I did *not* recommend either an electoral coalition or a coalition government, and still less that the Labour Party 'must abandon in advance the goal of forming a majority government' and seek a coalition instead (A Freeman and D Minns, *Guardian* Oct 1983). I have *never* said that Labour 'can only really make progress if it makes some electoral or other arrangements with the . . Alliance' (Eric Heffer). I have simply raised the question what happens at the next election if Labour's recovery is not sufficient to beat Thatcher single-handed. However we answer this question, someone has to ask it, because it does not go away if we shut our eyes. My own answer, in print, is that I regard 'the need to unite the anti-Thatcher forces by electoral arrangements in four years' time as the second-worst outcome in British politics', but nevertheless as 'preferable to the worst outcome, another Thatcher victory.' (*Guardian* Nov 2 1983). But that was *not* what my article was about. It was about the ways to avoid either of these two outcomes.

Not just policies but supporters

Why the debate has homed in so overwhelmingly on this one point, brings us back to the basic attitudes of the Left to the Labour Party. Most of the critics who reject the suggestion, merely express an understandable outrage. But behind it, I think, there lies an approach similar to Miliband's, and which Raymond Williams has put into the form of a careful argument in his article 'Socialists and Coalitionists'



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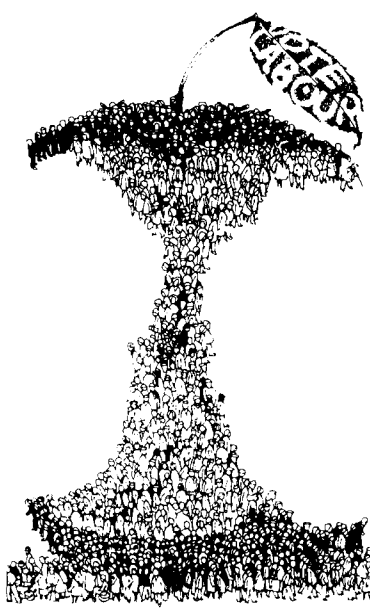
(*New Socialist* March-April 1984). He accepts that those who take a similar view to myself do not want a coalition, but a Labour government. But, he argues, they are prepared to entertain the idea of a common front of Centre and Left, because they see even the Labour Party itself, as it has developed, as such a coalition, and so they find a wider common front acceptable, if by any chance a victory of Labour

the prospect of rallying a minority of convinced socialists who hope against hope that sometime something will turn up

(the 'narrow coalition') is impossible. But, he argues, this side-steps the crucial question of the *socialist* character of its policies. So indeed, he agrees, do others on the Left, who have accepted the Labour policies of 1983 as 'left' and 'socialist', though there is actually nothing specifically socialist about most of them. Nor does such a programme become more socialist by being combined with 'a bold announcement of a committment to socialism,' or by assuming that we only need to follow 'the answers . . . already known and advanced by the Left in the Party . . . (which) is the way to a repetition of a merely divisive factionalism.' All the same, the so-called 'coalitionists' (little or big) are basically content with another version of the old social-democratic policies, and socialists cannot be.

This undoubtedly puts its finger on a crucial question: what policies the labour movement and Labour governments should



pursue if they want to do more than make the best of a bad job, and give capitalism 'a human face' — which, of course, many non-socialists also want to do. And behind this lies the even more crucial question, just how we envisage a British socialism. But these questions have two sides. They certainly require 'in the next four years . . . the radical reconstruction of all the main directions of policy in the light of the most open and informed socialist analysis.' But we also have to face the problem of how people whose interest in politics, or for that matter unions, is not socialist, and not necessarily identified in their minds with the struggle for socialism, can be convinced that socialism, and a socialist Labour Party, is for them. This is the wider problem of the politics of Labour, which includes, but is not the same as, the narrower problem of its programme and policies.

Against sectarian radicalism

It is not a new problem, though it is today very much more difficult than during Labour's 'forward march' in the first half of the century, when we could rely on a growing number of workers accepting the equation: class=support for the workers' party=being against capitalism=for socialism. Even that was not enough, as the history of the Labour Party shows. But today we can't rely on the automatic growth of class consciousness with these implications any more. We can no longer even rely on the skilled workers, the traditional 'spine' of the labour movement, staying unconditionally loyal to Labour as 'their team'. And even where we can still rely on such loyalty which automatically identifies class, party and (more doubtfully) socialism, we cannot overlook the masses who no longer have it, either shopping around among other parties, or alienated from politics, or even drawn away by Thatcherite propaganda. Let us not forget that the mass support for the Tories has not significantly diminished since 1979, and remains at the level of June 1983 even today, *nine months after the election*. So the problem of building a foundation for the advance of socialism, even among workers, cannot be simply treated as something internal to the Labour Party. And when we consider other parts or cross-sections of the people who can and must be mobilised for the transformation of Britain, then it is even less possible to think of it in this limited way.

If we can't win, or win back, these masses, then there is no foreseeable way forward. There is only the prospect of rallying a minority of convinced socialists who hope against hope that sometime something will turn up. In fact, of writing off the hope of making Labour a force for socialist advance. Raymond Williams, it seems, is close to such pessimism — but then, he sees the past history of the Labour Party, in the very period when it became a party committed to socialism and millions rallied to it as such, namely 'during the generations of Liberal decline,' simply as 'the only realistic Left-of-Tory coalition.' 'Labour's Lost Millions', which rejects this view, was not a call for retreat into opportunism making the best of a bad job, but a call for advance. It did not even see the broad anti-Thatcherite front which is surely quite essential today, as a mere defence against encroaching reaction. It is that, certainly — but the history of the anti-fascist struggles shows that those purely defensive struggles were the foundation of major advances of the Left — not least in Britain. It was not a call for a more moderate approach against the 'more radical tactics' of Williams and others, but against the sort of short-sighted and sectarian 'radicalism' which Lenin, for one, criticised, and which, to put it mildly, has done the Labour Party no good. *And which therefore has weakened the Left.* For it is a historical fact that, since 1917, the Left (including notably the Marxist Left) and support for the Labour Party have tended to grow and fall *together*, and not at each other's expense.

FOR UNITY AND AGAINST COMPLACENCY

'Labour's Lost Millions' was about changing Labour's approach and the general lines of its future work, rather than specific activities or policies. As to the general 'model' for the future, it suggested learning something from the Italian Communist Party, just because 'it is and wishes to remain a classical mass socialist labour party, attempting to rally the widest range of forces around its essential core of the working class.' I would agree with Westergaard that we can also learn from the Swedish Social Democrats who won their way back to power in 1982 with a programme 'to ease economic power out of private hands — and won, despite signs of a creeping erosion of traditional class allegiance.' (*New Socialist*, Jan-Feb 1984).

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Various relevant points have been made by Michael Meacher (with whom I entirely agree) and Robin Cook (with whom I almost entirely agree) (*Marxism Today* Nov 1983) as well as other contributors in *Marxism Today* (Bert Munro, Des Walshe *Marxism Today* Jan 1984; Roger Poole, Dave Cook, *Marxism Today* Feb 1984) and elsewhere (Stuart Hall, New Socialist Jan-Feb 1984) whom I take to be broadly in agreement with 'Labour's Lost Millions'. There is no disagreement either with the proposals of what could and should be done made by Heffer and Massey/Segal/Wainwright, but unfortunately most of them could have been made, or were made and acted upon before June 1983, by the activists of the movement who did not spend too much of their time on what Robin Cook calls 'committee politics, of which the battlefield was the branch meeting victory was the mandating of delegates.' So they are not, by themselves, enough.

This is not the place to discuss further what Labour should and can do concretely. But it is certainly essential in conclusion to remind ourselves of two things which must *not* happen.

The first is the resumption, *from any side*, of the suicidal civil war within the Labour Party. It isn't likely that the existing leadership of the party will be directly challenged at present, since the 1983 Conference so clearly reflected the party's desire for unity and an end to fratricide, and since the new leadership has so obviously increased the party's support — as registered in the polls — by a third. But it is more than likely that local committee room battles to select and de-select delegates and candidates will have

> millions demoralised by the sight of Labour aiming to score own goals

the same effect. This would be a disaster. The Right must not indulge in scandalous wangles such as the attempt to keep Tony Benn off the shortlist for Chesterfield, which fortunately failed. Benn, quite apart from his personal qualifications, represents an important element in the Labour Party, which has the right to be represented in Parliament. Just so (like them or not) Healey and Hattersley represent something in the party, not to speak of MPs like, say, Frank Field who are not, and are not even regarded as, standard-bearers on the Labour Right, but who risk being de-selected because some faction or current wants their seats. If the politics of civil war are allowed to re-enter the Labour Party by the back door, it is lost.

The second thing which must not happen, is complacency. True, as Michael Meacher says, 'a consistent presentation of unity and a new charismatic leadership suddenly propelled the party (after the 1983 Conference) from third place in recent polls to neck-and-neck with the Tories (*Marxism Today* Nov 1983). (Well, not quite . . .) But while this showed that millions demoralised by the sight of Labour aiming to score own goals, wanted nothing better than to support a credible Labour Party, it is not and will not be enough. It merely means that, if these people can be held — and they can go away as fast as they returned — the fight to recover and extend Labour's support does not have to start as far back as it looked in June 1983. It will still have to be won. It will be very difficult to win it. We cannot rely on automatic disillusionment with Thatcher or the Alliance to do the job for us. The Labour Party and all other parts of the labour movement have a very full agenda for the next four years. Now that the reasons for Labour's defeat have been debated, it is time to concentrate on it. □

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The judges have carried through a silent revolution which has weakened the power of government and extended the role of the courts. But it is by no means all bad news.

Stephen Sedley

Administrative Law: A Tsar is Born?

So far as Britain can be said to have a constitution, it is to be found in the theory of the separation of powers — the doctrine that parliament, the civil service and the courts are each autonomous, subject only to the sovereign power of parliament to call ministers to account for the doings of the civil service and to pass laws which the courts are required to enforce. Judges, the theory runs, have no role in the business of government and in return are guaranteed freedom from political interference or control.

But within the framework, and sometimes straining against it, we have a historically active and inventive judiciary who do not always find it easy to forget that, like the rest of us, they know how the country should be run.

What I want to show in this article is that over recent years, a century after the supposed decline of judicial activism and three centuries after the constitutional settlement which confirmed the supremacy of parliament, the judiciary has quietly taken over a key territory previously claimed by government and is now consolidating its position. I also want to suggest that this development, though to a marked degree reactionary in its motivation, is by no means a retrograde step.

Administrative law

There is today an area of English law (Scotland has its own system) known as administrative law or public law. The procedure by which it is operated is known as judicial review. The basis of administrative law is the proposition, derived from the separation of powers, that administration must stay within the law and that the interpretation and enforcement of the law is the job of the courts alone. The modern state has a vast administrative apparatus at national and local levels, practically all of it set up under Acts of Parliament which give wide powers and large discretions to the elected and appointed bodies they create.

Administrative law is therefore the means by which the courts adjudicate on the legality of administrative action taken by these branches of the state, from ministers and local authorities to petty officials. It is distinct from private law, which depends on the existence of individual legal rights and remedies, and from criminal law, which deals with individual acts prohibited by the state. In administrative law today, provided the applicant has a reasonable and tangible concern with an issue, the court will allow him or her or it to ventilate the issue by judicial review and will call the state to account without further regard to what the applicant personally stands to gain.

Most other countries have systems of public law, but they have come into existence through legislation or written constitutions, assigning to the judges their place in the system and defining their powers. In this country the system has been the invention of the judges: as one might expect, the place they have assigned themselves is central and their powers are considerable. But what is every bit as important is that, for reasons directly linked with the historical role of individualism in our society, they have accorded the individual a major role in initiating administrative law challenges to the state.

A variety of motives

It is nevertheless important to remember that Britain has escaped one burden with which the positivism of written constitutions has saddled other capitalist democracies — a judicial power to strike down legislation as unconstitutional. One has only to see how the United States Supreme Court, packed with reactionary nominees of Nixon and Reagan, has sabotaged Congress's civil rights legislation in order to appreciate what we have been spared. But it is also necessary to remember that there is a militantly conservative element of our judiciary and of our political Right who would dearly like the judges to have such powers. As Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham has called for a Bill of Rights which would entrench certain liberties against anything a future parliament might do; and as Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning acted from time to time as if he already had such powers.

It would be unrealistic to think that a desire to trammel elected national or local governments — or to be able to if things became critical — has not played a

Lord Hailsham: one of a militantly conservative element?

substantial if silent part in motivating the judges to extend their domain. But it would be a mistake not to recognise that there are other motives. Some of the actions of modern bureaucracies are so high-handed that they offend any sense of justice, and most judges will find ways of undoing them if they can. At a deeper level the growth and power of the corporate state offends the high Tory individualism which characterises much of the judiciary. In this the traditional Right finds common ground in its concerns with those of the Left. They differ of course in their analysis: the Right sees the state machine as creeping socialism, preying on property and status; the Left sees in it the long-term growth of authoritarianism, stifling democratic rights. But both can and do join in characterising its worst manifestations as the denial of natural justice and the abuse of power. So the aim of administrative law to control and curb such forms of misgovernment com-

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mands very general assent.

But in developing a system of law that can give effect to these concerns the judges have had to operate under one clear constraint: if they trespass visibly on the sovereignty of parliament they will jeopardise their freedom from overt political control, an asset which they rightly appreciate is invaluable to them and to the political system of which they are part.

For these reasons the courts when hearing administrative law cases do not claim to be sitting as a supreme constitutional arbiter. They acknowledge that parliament is always entitled to the last word. But within that necessary constitutional limit the courts have created and are now consolidating a powerful new position from which they can supervise significant areas of government.

A matter of precedent

The most remarkable feature of the common law system is that it never admits inventing anything. If a direct precedent cannot be found to deal with a new case, established principles will be extended to fill the gap. So to an uninquiring observer the modern system of administrative law contains on the face of it very little that is new. The power of the courts to interpret the law; the duty of the administrative branches of government (the executive) and of local authorities to obey the law; the right of the judges to strike down administrative decisions which do not conform to the law: all these have existed in principle for centuries. What is new is the assembly of these elements into a distinct and coherent system with its own procedural rules, operated by specialist High Court judges and offering remedies not obtainable in any other part of the legal system.

Thus when the borough of Bromley challenged the GLC's right to pass on some of the cost of cheaper fares, nobody doubted that the courts had power to interpret the transport legislation, to say what powers and duties it and the rating laws created, to decide whether the GLC and London Transport were acting within the law and to strike down any decision or activity not permitted by law. It was the result, overturning a manifestly rational policy on which Labour had actually gone to the polls, which shook people.

The challenge of Labour

Lord Diplock, the senior Law Lord and the engineer, if not quite the architect, of the new system has described it as the most important development of his judicial lifetime. Why? Perhaps the most important reason is that, however little enduring change the Left might feel its national and local administrations have brought about, the Right has been seriously alarmed at the prospect of socialism in Whitehall and town hall. Its alarm has been magnified by the failure of its less clever analysts to understand the difference between social democracy and socialism. The judiciary's abiding opposition to things like rent control, slum clearance and fair wages policies (all of them seen as interferences with the free market and therefore with individual liberty) has been made plain by a string of judgements from the early years of the century. But these tended to be one-off decisions, probably corresponding with a feeling that Labour was not a long term or fundamental threat. After 1945 no Tory could be so complacent, not so much because of the Attlee government's social reforms — although to many Tories they looked like Bolshevism — but because the magnitude of the electoral victory reflected a depth and strength of popular political will which the establishment was not equipped to confront. This fear has never gone, and from time to time it has been stoked up again to panic level, most recently with the return of a left-led Labour GLC.

Now the credibility of the law, which demands a reasonable degree of consistency, cannot survive repeated excursions to deal specifically with troublesome socialist administrations. A means has had to be found of dealing consistently with legal questions of administration and local government. It was in 1948, in an unremarkable case about cinema licensing,[1] that the then Master of the Rolls set about systematising the principles on which the courts could interfere with decisions of executive or local government. Three years later the then Lord Chief Justice led the way in prising open the closed books of the administrative tribunals which the welfare state was spawning in great numbers[2]: if the courts could be shown an error made by such a tribunal in applying the law, they could quash the tribunal's decision even though there was no right of appeal against it.

It is important, for this reason, to appreciate the difference between judicial review and appeal. The right to appeal is a statutory right to have a decision taken afresh by a higher court. Judicial review is limited to ensuring that a body entrusted with making a decision goes about it in a lawful way. In this way administrative law can claim to stay out of the actual business of making political or administrative decisions. In practice, however, its effect on political administration is substantial: it is not simply that it has enabled the courts to bar certain important paths to socialist goals — it has also enabled the courts to give the seal of legitimacy to other, often reactionary, activities by refusing to halt them.

The Fares Fair campaign — a manifestly rational policy overturned

[1] Associated Provincial Picture Houses v Wednesbury Corporation (1948) 1 KB 223.

[2] R v Northumberland Compensation Appeal Tribunal, ex parte Shaw (1951) 1 KB 711, (1952) 1KB 338.

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A temptation too great

The wiser judges have always appreciated that if administrative law is used to obstruct political initiatives which the courts happen to dislike, the system's reputation will be irreparably damaged. But there are too many judges who have been unable to resist the temptation to use the doctrines of administrative law to achieve results which to them seem merely reasonable but which strike the people who thought they had voted for something different as perverse and politically motivated. It is significant that many of the landmark cases have been decisions against Labour national or local administrations, because it is at these points that the judges have had to expand the existing law in order to decide the cases satisfactorily.

The casualty list is familiar to the Left. In 1968 a minister did what his predecessors had always done — rejected a request for an inquiry because it would probably have led to an inconvenient result. The difference was that he was a Labour minister and the people he had upset were a powerful group of farmers. The House of Lords struck down his decision.[3] The minister did not have a free hand, they said: his duty was only to carry out the policy and objects of the relevant Act, and it was for the courts to decide what those were. He could not shelter behind the fact that he had no obligation to give any reasons for his decision and had given none: if he gave no reasons the court could infer that he had none.

> The GLC decision did much to undermine the political reputation of the courts for being non-political...

Four years later, when the Tory government used the Industrial Relations Act to stop the railwaymen's work to rule, the Court of Appeal showed a strikingly dissimilar lack of interest in the minister's reasons for believing, as he said he did, the ASLEF's members were not behind the work to rule.[4] They refused to quash his order for a cooling-off period and a ballot. Another four years on, a Tory council was obstructing a Labour government's policy on comprehensive education. The minister had power under the Education Act to overrule an unreasonable decision of a local education authority — but the House of Lords held that that did not entitle him to overrule a policy on which a local council had been elected merely because he disagreed with it.[5] The fact that the Labour government had also been elected on *its* educational policy received no more credit than the electoral mandate of the Clay Cross councillors had received from the Court of Appeal some years before.[6]

The deepest wound was inflicted most recently, when the Tory-controlled borough of Bromley challenged the GLC's 'Fares Fair' policy, raising every political bogey from husbandry of the rates to municipal socialism. The two High Court judges who first heard the case realised that they were being asked to substitute their own political decision for the GLC's and threw the case out. Neither the Court of Appeal nor the House of Lords could restrain itself, and in the final appeal, in which the argument was widely felt to have gone overwhelmingly in the GLC's favour, the five law lords unanimously held that the policy must be struck down, but for five different and in places incompatible reasons.[7] The decision did much to undermine the public reputation of the courts for being non-political, and it was left to humbler judges to repair the damage by rejecting a number of further applications for judicial review of Labour council policies which followed hopefully in Bromley's wake.[8]

A set of general principles

The principles which these decisions proclaim, however, are quite general. They are, for example, that the civil service must stay within the overall policy and objects of the legislation it is implementing — the spirit and not merely the letter of the law; or that a decision is not unreasonable merely because somebody in authority disagrees with it. And a major line of cases since 1964[9] has established that whenever administrative judgements are made which affect people's rights, such people have a right to know what is being said against them and to answer for themselves. Here too the principle is an old one,[10] but it has been expanded and systematised in recent years as a further check on the powers of the executive. It has also been adopted by the employment protection legislation (as the carrot which went with the stick in the Industrial Relations Act) and then whittled down by the use of administrative law techniques, so that industrial tribunals can no longer hold a dismissal to be unfair merely because they disagree with it.[11]

The most intriguing, and perhaps most revealing, step in the process of growth occurred in 1967 when the government — or more probably the civil service — decided to implement an old election promise to compensate victims of crimes of violence not by legislation but by using the prerogative power of the Crown. That is to say, it was simply announced by the Home Secretary that he, as a Minister of the Crown, was setting up a body called the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board which would distribute compensation according to guidelines issued by him. When a policeman's widow went to court to challenge one of the Board's decisions, the Board claimed that they were not answerable to the court because nobody had any legal right to an award from them — they simply gave out money in the name of the Crown as they saw fit. The court, which at that time was not noted for its toughness towards government, saw the dangers: if the exercise of prerogative powers in areas other than foreign relations were to provide an escape from the control of the courts, there was practically no limit to what a future government, acting quite constitutionally, might arrange to do in the name of the Crown and beyond the reach of judicial review. How far they saw it as a threat of constitutional socialism and how far as a threat of arbitrary and authoritarian government (if indeed they distinguished the two) one can only guess. But they held that the Board was accountable to the court for the proper operation of the compensation scheme.[12]

> We ought perhaps to be pleased that the judges have done a beneficial thing for whatever reason

In a remarkable perceptive judgement Lord Justice (now Lord) Diplock pointed out that the state was attempting to revert to a method of government which had been overturned though never formally abolished by the constitutional conflict and settlement of the seventeenth century. The judges were much too astute to let the executive re-establish a stronghold, immune from judicial review, from which governments might one day launch who knew what assaults on rights prized by the courts.

Two years later the judiciary carried the offensive deep into parliament's territory.[13] Parliament's last resort against judicial review had been thought to be those enactments which set up administrative tribunals and expressly provided that their decisions should not be called in question in any court of law. One such tribunal, the Foreign Compensation Commission, refused compensation to a company hit by the Suez crisis. The House of Lords held that the parliament's 'exclusionary clause' was

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insufficient to prevent the courts deciding whether the Commission had exceeded or misinterpreted its terms of reference and quashing any decision which ought not to have been reached.

A silent revolution accomplished

These have been some of the critical battles in a silent war in which the initiative and forward strategy has all been on one side. The results, in a state in which government constantly strives for secrecy and against accountability, are far from being negative or reactionary. They represent one of the few constitutional avenues of public challenge to authorities and tribunals whose decisions can crucially affect our lives. Indeed, the judges themselves have been careful to keep a back door open through which they can retreat from challenges to government for which they have no stomach. The form the retreat takes in law is twofold. There is a rule that where a statute provides for a minister to deal with complaints of non-implementation, the courts will abdicate in favour of the minister and refuse to consider the complaint. In this way the judges have, for example, washed their hands of cases where it was alleged the local authorities were failing to carry out their duties under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act. But with the developing confidence of the courts which try administrative law cases this rule is being modified into a much more rational practice that matters of detailed policy or political judgment will be left to the minister, but issues of law will be retained and decided by the courts.[14]

The second form of retreat is what is known as the judicial discretion — the power to refuse redress because of overriding considerations of administrative convenience for the state or moral unworthiness of the applicant.[15]

The judiciary now seems confident that a strong and flexible system of administrative law exists on which it can rely. It has recently expressed that confidence by deciding that judicial review is not simply to be *a* way but is to be *the* way by which all administrative law cases — that is all challenges to the exercise of state power — are brought.[16] The procedure, which has been carefully systematised, contains a series of filters to sift out claims which are too embarrassing or troublesome — but the courts have now to be very careful how they use them for fear of displaying partiality.

Recent experience has been encouraging. The Hillingdon doctors who could not get an injunction to stop the closure of their hospital using private law rights to protect their contracts were successful in using public law to quash the closure decision on the ground that their contracts had been ignored in reaching the decision.[17] Prisoners, who years before in a private law case[18] had been denied a right to legal representation on disciplinary charges, have won a substantial range of protection by means of judicial review — that is to say a challenge through administrative law — directed against the Boards of Visitors which tried them.[19] Gipsies, who years before had failed to get any help in securing decent sites by private law proceedings,[20] have succeeded in invoking administrative law to stop a local authority abusing its powers by evicting them.[14] In fact it was in the latter case that the court refused to leave the issue to the minister whose statutory job was to supervise the provision of gipsy sites, and itself struck down the local authority's decision.

A not unmixed blessing

Only a moralist such as T S Eliot could describe it as:

'the greatest treason
To do the right thing for the wrong reason'.

There are few absolute rights and wrongs in law or in politics, and no unmixed blessings. But it is possible to see today that for reasons which are probably a complicated mix of the reactionary and the progressive, we have a system of administrative law which has grown organically out of and into our legal and political institutions and practices. Its intended role as a bulwark against radical political change is plain; but because like all law it has to operate according to neutral principles, its machinery is also available in many cases to those people who are the real victims of the contemporary British state's desire for power without accountability. We ought perhaps to be pleased that the judges have done a beneficial thing for whatever reason. □

3 Padfield v Minister of Agriculture (1968) AC 997.
4 Secretary of State for Employment v ASLEF (No 2) (1972) ICR 19.
5 Secretary of State for Education v Tameside MBC (1977) AC 1014.
6 Asher v Secretary of State for the Environment (1974) Ch 208.
7 Bromley v GLC (1983) AC 768.
8 eg, R v Merseyside CC ex p Great Universal Stores (1982) 80 LGR 639; R v GLC ex p Kensington and Chelsea (*The Times* 7 April 1982).
9 Ridge v Baldwin (1964) AC 40.
10 eg, R v Chancellor of Cambridge University ex p Bentley (1723) 1 Str 557.
11 Vickers v Smith (1977) IRLR 11.
12 R v Criminal Injuries Compensation Board ex p Lain (1967) 2 QB 864.
13 Anisminic v Foreign Compensation Commission (1969) 2 AC 147.
14 R v Secretary of State for the Environment ex p Ward (*The Times*, 6 October 1983); cf Leigh v NUR (1970) Ch 326.
15 See Ward v Bradford Corporation (1972) 70 LGR 27, Glynn v Keele University (1971) 1 WLR 487: both cases in which students were denied redress against manifest injustices because of the court's view of their morals. See also Supreme Court Act 1981, s 31(6).
16 O'Reilly v Mackman (1983) AC237.
17 R v Hillingdon Health Authority ex p Goodwin (*The Times*, 13 December 1983).
18 Fraser v Mudge (1975) 1 WLR 1132.
19 R v Albany Board of Visitors ex p Tarrant (*The Times*, 9 November 1983).
20 Kensington and Chelsea v Wells (1974) 72 LGR 289.

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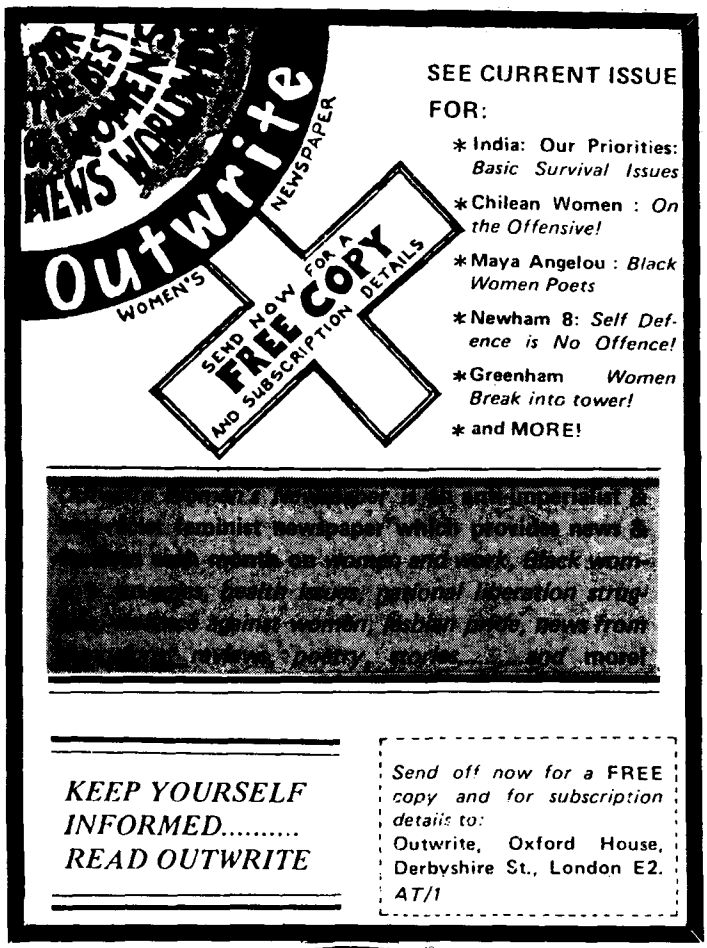

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At the last election a minority of trade unionists voted Labour. Relatively few trade unionists are involved in the broader campaigns of the Left. How do we set about changing that situation?

Richard Jewison

Unions in Search of their Members

Much discussion has taken place on the left about the extent of the decline in the Labour vote amongst trade unionists. After two massive defeats at the polls, the TUC is conducting a re-examination of policy and strategy that looks like shifting our whole movement to the right. This is in line with the theory that the unions should reflect the political views of the membership. The Left are not supporting this trend but could easily allow it to happen simply by not having an alternative. So how should we react to the decline in class and socialist consciousness? How should we organise to give leadership? What can be done to ensure that the limited number of left activists in the unions co-ordinate their efforts to greatest effect?

Policies not enough

The lessons of the experience of the Labour Left over the last five years must surely be that policies aren't everything. We can have the most progressive and well-thought policies and lose. If that aspect of the 'Labour's lost millions' debate can be taken as read, then perhaps we can get down to a serious look at how to put things right. To start reversing the decline and reviving class and socialist consciousness poses some questions of a fundamental nature. How can the leadership of all major unions be won to left policies? What steps are needed to persuade and give confidence to the average shop steward? Where do we direct our efforts so as to convince workers to support the policies and, more importantly, get involved in action?

There appears to be a consensus emerging on the Left that carrying resolutions and getting left leaderships elected is not enough. If it was correct in the past (and we can argue about that) this strategy is accepted as inadequate today by wide sections of the union movement. It is generally accepted that the 'old style' left leadership could only operate against a background of strong trade union discipline (closed shops were only part of that discipline). Now that discipline is breaking up there is a crying need for massive campaigning amongst the people as a whole to win them to progressive policies. Leadership and policies have an importance only insofar as they assist in this campaign. By winning the ideological battle with mass campaigning and agitation it follows that policies will be strengthened and the leadership will follow.

However, in recognising the need for a major shift in the emphasis of trade union work towards popular campaigning we must also be aware of its pitfalls and limitations. If we are to direct shop stewards and trade union activists into campaigning as opposed to the steady slog of more traditional trade union activity, then we must be sure that it will work. An assessment of such a strategy requires an examination of where it has been successful in the broader political arena.

A consensus is emerging on the Left that carrying resolutions and getting left leaderships elected is not enough

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Some weaknesses

If we take CND as being the most successful mass campaigning organisation this decade, we can learn a great deal. The obvious lesson is that a dynamic organisation, with modern and imaginative techniques, can achieve results. Many organisations, including trade unions, could be more effective if they adapted to the modern world, appealed to people across classes and channelled their finances away from bureaucracy and into campaigning. If this is correct then the Left in the trade union movement should be arguing for a reallocation of resources — the enlargement of our press, publicity, research and education departments.

Without really challenging this analysis the doubt still remains. This doubt comes from CND's acknowledged weakness — lack of mass trade union involvement. Whilst some 27 unions are affiliated (a tribute to the old-style left activity) few local union banners can be seen on demonstrations and local meetings are largely middle-class gatherings with only token trade union involvement. The failure of CND to gain mass trade union support and the hostility that greets the issue at hundreds of branch meetings and workplace shop stewards committees must cause us to at least hesitate before channelling *all* our efforts into mass campaigning.

Similar problems to those of CND can be found in the women's movement, black organisations, anti-racist campaigns and others; the middle-class base, the failure to build roots in the trade unions and the growing evidence that it's just as difficult to raise these issues at work as it was years ago. And the more successful these campaigns get the more those involved bemoan the failure of the trade unions to respond and the more impatient they become for trade unionists to take industrial action! So we come to a dilemma. Our strategy results in considerable success on a political level but trade unionists are not being won at the same speed. The dilemma could prove disastrous if as a result of discarding our old style and methods, we allow the TUC to force the movement along a 'non-political' course. Rank and file apathy, shown towards radical campaigns, could be used as an excuse for national unions to do nothing, and in many cases distance themselves from the campaigns. And the temptation of people at work seeking solutions to problems outside the workplace and via campaigns unconnected with work could divide politics and work in a dangerous way.

> Whilst some 27 unions are affiliated to CND. . . few local union banners can be seen on demonstrations

Building working class support

If the weakness in campaigning is that the working class can be left behind then the question of work within the trade union movement becomes crucial to the overall strategy. However, strong our impatience to 'go public', 'win people to socialism' and build the mass movement' necessary for change, that question — of working class support — must force us to take one step at a time. And for those who, as with the Communist Party, see the working class as actually leading the struggle, a pause before each step will be required.

We should constantly be asking those three questions mentioned earlier about the role of leadership, how to motivate rank and file activists and how to get to the membership. Without challenging the overall change in direction that the Left is taking, there is still a case for specific strategies being developed for our work in the trade unions. And if we accept that the overall socialist context of our labour movement's policies was due to good organisation then we must not be so dismissive of past practices. They were remarkably successful in winning for socialism the largest and most united trade union movement in any comparable capitalist country. In criticising past practices we should maintain some pride in our successes. The answer lies not in a total change in direction but the adapting of old and tried practices to meet the changed situation that we all recognise. Again the question of how we organise returns. Some proposals are required.

No matter how weak the trade union support for progressive policies and campaigns, it would be even weaker without left leadership (TGWU and NUPE activists are much more committed to CND than their counterparts in the AUEW or EEPTU). So the work that has always gone into winning broad left control at national executive and national officer level in the unions must go on. In fact, it is more essential today, because the right wing are better organised. And we're talking about the numerous boring meetings that trade unionists have to involve themselves in for months before and during elections. We must be prepared to see the importance of this work and not denigrate it as narrow and irrelevant. It is, and it always will be, essential.

What is correct is that we demand of that leadership the radical campaigning necessary to win mass support and that the

Rotherham, 1980

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LONDON AGAINST RACISM

1984 sees the start of a major drive by the GLC to make people aware of the damaging and divisive effects of racism in London.

The facts of racial disadvantage ought to be well known, but too often people choose to ignore or condone them – especially the way larger organisations perpetuate racism in their structures and practices.

To be effective, the London Against Racism campaign needs your support.

How? Partly by taking part in the programme of anti-racist activities and events in 1984, but most importantly by a personal commitment to the campaign – by becoming involved.

1 To fight racism in London, this is what we are asking you to do: Recognise that racism runs through all aspects of life in London; not ignore it, condone it, or gloss over it.

2 Agree the fundamental right of all Londoners to enjoy a level of *real* equality, justice, freedom and security that currently does not exist.

3 Create conditions, at home, at work and in the community that make it impossible for racism to operate.

4 Join with all ordinary people in London to fight the disadvantages common to them all.

5 Examine, criticise, challenge and change the structures that perpetuate racism in organisations.

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How can I become involved?

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ADDRESS _____

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leadership does not divorce itself from the rank and file. And we should also ensure that those tedious meetings do more than simply act as election caucuses and that they develop a political function. In recognising the need for such changes, we must also see the need to strengthen left organisation in individual unions and the movement as a whole.

Motivating activists

What advice should we be giving to an active trade unionist — Labour, Communist or left thinking militant? It should not escape the notice of the Left that many militant trade unionists are not involving themselves in the work of the labour movement outside the workplace, for example in trade councils, the Labour Party, the Communist party or even in many cases their own trade union branch.

This is a serious problem which we must recognise and tackle in an organised manner. Again, traditional left strategies may have something to offer. The emphasis of trade union educational work always has been directed at shop stewards. This had its weaknesses, not simply because the message did not seem to be getting back to the membership, but because not all shop stewards were trained. But during the 70s tremendous advances were made, and they need defending today. Our strategy, however, should now be to inject much more in the way of political education into shop stewards courses and developing similar work amongst trade union members.

> Most shop stewards are unable to adjust and are without the political understanding

As we have talked about political education for many years, for some the results seem very poor and so it is correct to review our approach. In fact it is a key responsibility of the Left in every union to discuss and plan the provision of courses for stewards. In doing this exercise, most unions will be seen to be allocating a totally inadequate sum of money. A few unions spend a lot, but often on residential accommodation or on expensive hotels. Whilst weekend schools have a role, the priority must be to reach the majority of stewards at courses organised during the working day.

And it is not just the quantity of courses that needs challenging, but the content as well. One of the big failures of TUC courses (the main source of training for most unions) is that they have taught the skills needed to operate under consensus management conditions. Now that conditions have changed most shop stewards are unable to adjust and are without the political understanding that would enable them to regroup their scattered troops and fight back. From now on, every course must deal with this problem. Every valuable minute of time off (which is harder to obtain than ever) must be used to equip shop stewards with the organising skills, the experience of campaigning and the confidence to go back to the workplace and mobilise the membership.

Peoples March 1983

Turning the tide

As part of our stewards' training programme, our approach to branch and stewards' committee meetings and our general style of work, we have to face the challenge of turning militant trade unionists into socialists. This can only partly be achieved by discussion. Crucial to political development is involvement in *action*. Somehow, we must get away from simply saying 'attend your trades council' (which may put people off, more than involve them) or 'join the Labour Party' (which may be a larger step than an active trade unionist is prepared to take). More important is to involve shop stewards in any activity that attracts them. Some will have organisational abilities and enjoy an official position. Others will be talkers, or writers, or people that enjoy making a physical contribution, such as distributing leaflets. With the variety of skills and preferences that exist within our movement, we should

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TUC-organised demonstration for NHS pay claim.

Port Talbot, 1980

be able to motivate people to action. If we take the time to listen and tune into the mood of those being elected at today's workplaces, we will again attract people to involve themselves in the wider movement. If we don't we'll 'leave the working class behind'.

The break-up of the closed shop, the media sucess in dividing left leaders from their members, the replacement of traditional industries by newer, more dispersed units of production and the deadening effect of unemployment, have all contributed to a loss of support from trade unionists as a whole for their unions. A major challenge confronts us as the Tory anti-union legislation bites deeper into our flesh. A gaping wound has opened with the failure of the NGA to win the Messenger dispute. The law changing the rules of contracting out to contracting in for the payment of the political levy could see the labour movement's life blood ebb away as the extent of our failure to convince our members is shown up in a dramatic reduction in Labour's finances.

But, of course, that is only if the movement accepts defeat. What is certain is that we cannot accept this pessimistic outlook and that we must persuade our people to take political action. This can be done and it may well be that by forcing the movement to justify political contributions from trade unionists the Government will do us a service, indirectly, with their forthcoming trade union bill. It would be a mistake, though, to see this campaign as the only one, or even the most important one to occupy the Left in the unions. Trade union loyalty derives from class consciousness rather than party loyalty and much more immediate in terms of priorities is the development of that class consciousness that existed in the older manual industries amongst today's radically changed working class. And that can only be done by developing trade union activity and organisation, almost from scratch in hundreds of workplaces, industries and services that have so far learned little or nothing about the history of their class and its organisations. A gigantic task indeed for a movement that's been through five years of demoralising retreat.

The politics of trade union work

To argue for a massive effort to be made to bring trade unionists into the struggle is not to deny the need for a more campaigning style of politics. Whether you're a miner defending your pit, a hospital worker fighting privatisation, or a shipyard worker desperate to save your community from the effect of a yard closure, the need for a broad and widely supported campaign of a political character is obvious. It's no good relying on industrial action, supported by a loyal trade union workforce, to win battles that are clearly part of a much wider onslaught on the working class and our communities. Those communities must be mobilised and a broad alliance built up if victories are to be achieved.

Communities must be mobilised and a broad alliance built up if victories are to be achieved

But when we mount our campaigns — as we must in ever increasing numbers and strength — let us not forget the campaign that is necessary at work. And if some on the Left seem preoccupied with their trade union work, with little time left for wider political activity, it is important to understand the extent of the task they face. Provided that left trade unionists are guided by an understanding of the overall task it is not only legitimate but essential that they should make their trade union work a priority. It is the job of the political parties to understand the problems faced by trade unionists and to influence how they tackle them. In this way, the working class will not only be part of the broad democratic alliance that will eventually defeat Thatcher and her policies, it will go on to lead that movement in the direction of progressive political change. □

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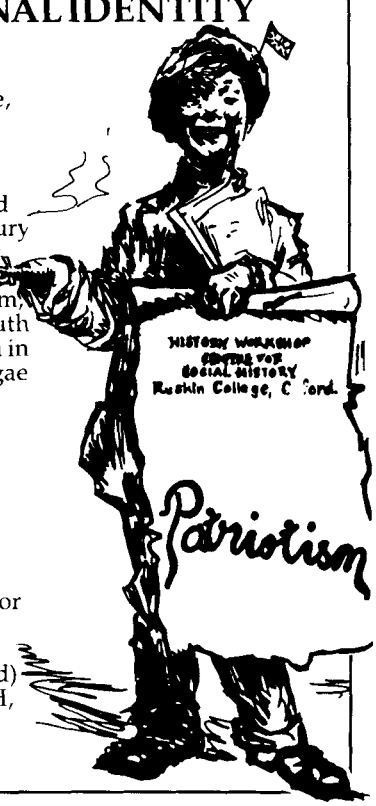

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Green politics in Britain is nothing like the force it is in West Germany. But it is on the rise. Sellafield, acid rain, Greenham and nuclear dumping could be straws in the wind.

Britain's Growing Greens

Interview with Jonathon Porritt

Jonathon Porritt is co-chairperson of the Ecology Party's Political Committee. Here he is interviewed by Bob Dent.

The Ecology Party manifesto at the last election said 'green politics is the single most significant international movement since the birth of socialism at the end of the 19th century.' What aspects of socialism do you see green politics incorporating and what aspects do you see it rejecting or going beyond?

The first important 'socialist' element of green politics is a redistributive emphasis. What is clear is that you are not going to get an ecological society without a very radical redistribution of wealth, of land and of the means of production. We are asking people to be dependent on a different set of values and a different interpretation of wealth, and not to be dependent upon so-called affluence. You could not possibly make that demand or request in a society as grotesquely inegalitarian as ours. And therefore, even to begin to contemplate moving towards a green political future, we have got to talk more radically about the redistribution of wealth. The second thing is the recognition of the way in which power operates in society and the extent to which groups of people are quite literally disenfranchised, or disempowered, and not able to play any part in society. So again, the emphasis from the Left on correcting the balance in terms of influence in society is crucial.

The things from the Left, or from certain wings of the Left, which we would find incompatible are the following. Firstly, the emphasis on reindustrialisation, which to us is an anachronistic response. Understandable, but anachronistic because it's failed really to confront some of the changes which have taken place in the world economy. Secondly the emphasis on centralisation which is of paramount importance to traditional socialism. And lastly the emphasis on the state which is, I suppose, a reflection of the centralisation theme in a particular form.

My own personal points of familiarity and very close connection with the Left come from the early libertarian traditions, William Morris and so on, and from the anarchist traditions of left politics. I think that form of decentralised socialism is something that has had a pretty rough time in socialist politics during the course of this century.

Of the three points of difference — reindustrialisation, centralisation and statism — the last two are ones which sections of the Left have, at times, dealt with quite critically. But the first one, the question of reindustrialisation and growth, distinguishes the Ecology Party, and green politics generally, quite sharply from the Left.

This really is the key. It's not growth itself, however, that we are opposed to. It's the concept of an economy that attempts to meet people's needs by ever-increasing production and consumption. We are historically at a complicated time. If you look back, it is quite evident that people's welfare has benefited from this economic approach. No ecologist is going to sit here and say it hasn't served the needs and interests of people in the past. But as soon as you begin a real costing of what we are now getting out of that type of economic approach, you come to a much more undecided area, where the benefits may well be exceeded by the costs of pursuing that type of future.

Firstly there is the problem of new technology. It is apparent that the relationship between productivity and employment has broken down. In the past you could reasonably expect that if you increased your productivity, then employment would follow along behind it in a more-or-less predictable pattern. This is not going to happen in the future. You can now envisage a growth economy which is creating no work at all.

Secondly there is the ecological aspect. If you look at that type of growth and the impact it will have on our biological systems, which are the key to our wealth, it is evident that they cannot be sustained indefinitely into the future. Ecologists don't talk any longer about oil running out or this and that mineral becoming extinct by such and such a time. But if you look at the net demand we are making on the planet and project the needs of people over the course of time against what the planet can meet, it's evident that at some stage in the future we are going to come to the end of the present consumption of finite resources. Either we cause the end ourselves, or it happens through some means which will be extremely unpleasant to live through.

> You can now envisage a growth economy which is creating no work at all

Thirdly, and this is a very difficult area, there's the question of whether the pursuit of social well-being through economistic goals is actually benefiting people. Clearly one is on very vulnerable ground, and it is very difficult to talk about things like this when there are still people living below the poverty line. But if we emphasise the element of wealth as the be-all and end-all of targets, of goals, of things towards which we should be aiming, we are impoverishing people in a very different, subtle, way. It's a very simple thing, but if you encourage people's instincts of greed, envy, competition and materialism, the basis of your society is bit by bit very insidiously being corrupted.

Could you say more about how you see unemployment?

This is an intriguing area. It's astonishing how a Tory government could be re-elected on the basis of what they have done, given the

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level of unemployment and their refusal to make promises about reducing it. Now polls suggest that although people put unemployment at the top of their list of concerns, they do not believe what the major parties are telling them is going to happen. Where does that cynicism, or scepticism come from? People are, I believe, wiser than the people who claim to represent them. Now, maybe I'm just saying that to persuade myself because it is part of the Ecology Party's platform that full employment is a thing of the past in the sense that we will never return to the days of full employment as measured by each person having a job for a certain number of hours a week at a fixed rate for a fixed employer.

So what's the alternative?

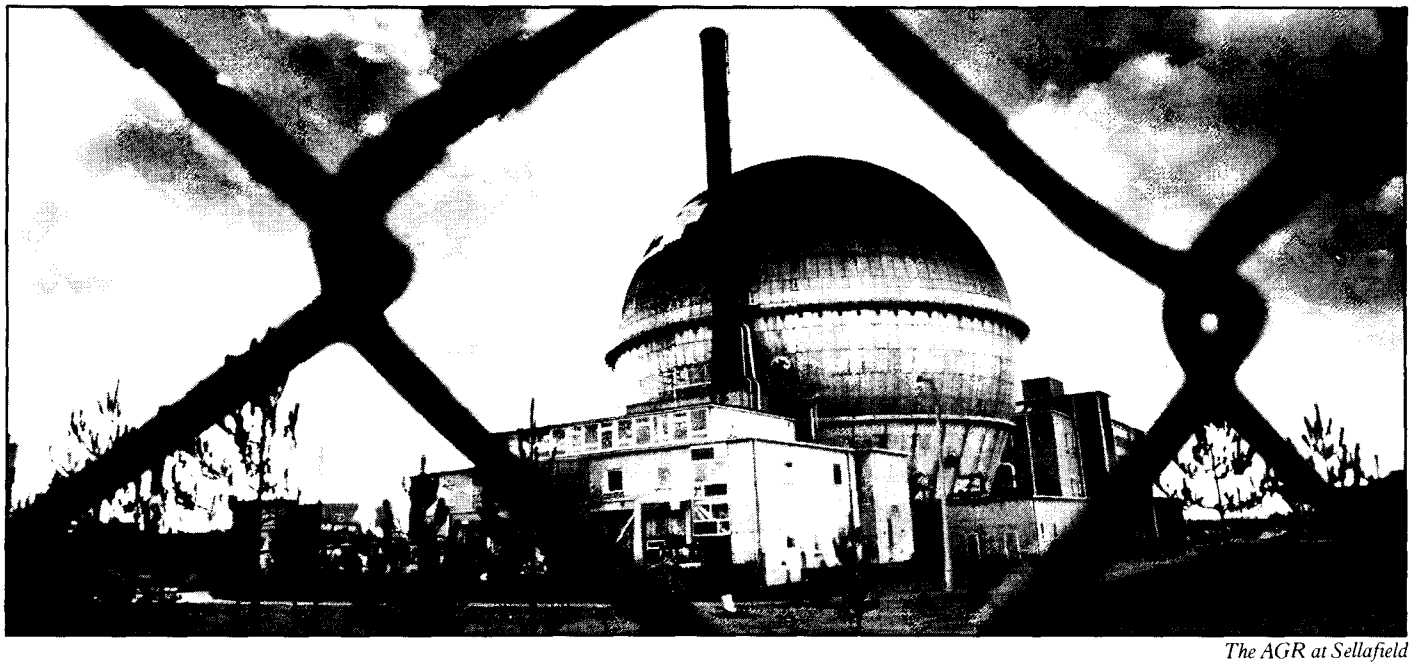
The alternative lies in getting away from our present type of economy. But firstly it has to be said that the formal economy, the large-scale old-fashioned economy, is still immensely important. We don't do ourselves a service by laying so much emphasis on the alternatives. People think we want to run all that down. Clearly, that formal economy is going to be the backbone of our employment creation for at least the next decade. There's no question about that. But there must also be no doubt that during that time both technological pressures and pressures from newly-industrialised countries will ensure that millions of jobs will be lost in that sector of the economy. So although we acknowledge that it's important, we have got to shift the emphasis elsewhere. We would shift it in three ways.

Firstly, instead of generating our wealth by attacking the earth and using it for our own so-called benefit, we should create wealth and employment by living in harmony with the planet. For example, by putting a huge emphasis and great prestige on creating energy by nuclear power, we feel we are doing something against the interests of the earth. And in my case, simply from the employment aspect alone, it would be more sensible to adopt an alternative energy strategy. Secondly we must become more self-reliant as an economy. It's complicated, and we acknowledge the difficulties, but this is an important aspect of ecological principles as well as an important part of getting the economy back on a sounder basis. We would introduce import substitution schemes and tariff barriers as soon as possible so that our obsession with world trade as a means of generating wealth would be turned on its head. We would generate wealth by creating things for ourselves in our own communities.

The third area is that of structural change. It's obvious that as work declines in the formal sector of the economy, you've got to give more people access to that work. You can't have what will become this increasingly small elite of people with highly paid jobs, in often highly intensive export-oriented industries, with the mass of people on the periphery. That's the direction we are going in with new technology at the moment. You could actually have a society where the minority of people are employed and the rest are on the edges. Mike Cooley and various others have talked about this. Some people in our capitalist system are dead keen to be moving towards this, and that's why technology is being used in the way it is being used today.

I can imagine many socialists thinking this is all very well, but what you are faced with is the question of the control of resources and power in society. What do you do about that?

OK, the things we want to achieve will be opposed, violently at certain levels, by people who have a vested interest in the way the economy runs at present. But how do you oppose those forces in society? Now the conventional answer from the Left has always been that you have to mobilise a mass in order to generate a power block which is as strong as the group from whom you are trying to take power. And so the emphasis is on 'the working class', regardless of whether that as an entity is still valid in Britain. The emphasis is on mobilising a specific segment of society in order to take power from another segment of society. The trade unions will be part of that particular movement. Now in many respects the trade unions are an extension and reflection of the problem, as is a class analysis of politics. By endlessly emphasising these differences you simply guarantee an element of continuity in the war between different sections of society which results in a stalemate. What we are talking about is, I suppose, a much more anarchistic approach to the idea of divesting power blocs of the power they have. Clearly that can sound either very woolly, or rather irrelevant for the times in which we live. After all, those people who have the power are, if anything, tightening their hold and are ensuring that it will be harder to get that power away from them in the future.



The AGR at Sellafield

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But the class argument is that firstly, economic resources are in the hands of a few and need to be socialised, and secondly the working class is that section of people in society who produce the wealth at the point of production and they are the people who, if they act together, can actually socialise production. They have the economic power because they provide the labour. There is an actual conflict of interests between the capitalists as a class and workers as a class.

You don't have to turn this into a class analysis of politics. What you can turn it into is an analysis of politics in terms of people who do have power and access to wealth and those who don't. It's inappropriate to talk about that division exclusively in class terms. There are all sorts of people on both sides of that divide who you could not explain or interpret within a class analysis. I'm not trying to get out of this. I want to confront it because green politics, in my mind, has always been too 'soft'. It has allowed people to think it doesn't need to take a confrontational stance. It's allowed people to see it as something very nice and gentle. That's part of our politics. But we have got to identify far more closely with people who are on the side of the divide where they are excluded from power and from wealth, and we have to identify the enemies on the other side of the divide. I would say that quite emphatically.

Could you say something more about the redistribution of wealth?

The means by which the conventional Left want to redistribute wealth presents a major problem for us. They are still talking about a lot of nationalisation and major planning controls. Now to us that isn't going to work. We favour a more decentralised economy, with local savings banks and the various types of input that you can make with regional enterprise boards. The GLC provides a very interesting example of how this can be achieved at a local level, whereas by definition, you cannot do that at national level. If you look at the concept of local production for local needs in a co-operatively based society, which in a nutshell is what an 'eco' economy would be like, then you can talk about a genuine redistribution of wealth. If you do it on a national level, with huge schemes and massive plans, then people will just not get a look in.

Then there is the idea of global redistribution. There is no way that the Third World is going to be able to adopt our pattern of industrialisation. Are we callously going to carry on saying, 'OK you will forever rot in that state of neglect'? Or are we actually going to find ways of narrowing the gap, not through Brandt-type proposals, which are clearly in the interests of the West, but in ways which will benefit the Third World. Finally there is the redistribution of wealth across generations. If you redistribute the wealth today at the expense of generations to come how closely is one abiding by one's socialist principles? We would take on board the idea of responsibility for future generations to come. Although it is harder to pin down, it is just as much part of one's commitment to human values as responsibility for people alive on the planet now.

The division between the Right and the Left in some senses could be characterised as a debate between public and private, the collective versus the individual. Where does green politics stand in that divide? Do you think it is a fundamental one?

Basically we are asking people to acknowledge a different political contract whereby the levels which previously have been seen as opposite, namely all the emphasis on the individual or all the emphasis on the collective, can be viewed from a different angle. What we are trying to do is squeeze out of the area of politics the national entity, the central entity. The two bits we would like to get back into focus are the community level, in which to talk about the individual has meaning, and at the other end the international level. The nationalistic emphasis in the middle is really what confuses a lot of the debate. If you think of politics in terms of both global responsibility and individual rights, human rights, then collectivism and individualism have to be brought together.

Why do you favour a separate Ecology Party rather than being a general pressure group or perhaps working in other parties, like the Socialist Environment and Resources Association in the Labour Party?

Certainly given the political system in this country you have got to be pretty demented to set up a political party. Minority politics is nobody's idea of fun! I can assure you we wouldn't go on doing it unless everyone was convinced of the need for a separate party.

There is no way that the Third World is going to be able to adopt our pattern of industrialisation

The green position can be taken on board in bits and pieces by other parties but the unique expression of it as a holistic viewpoint is something that is so radically different from what any other party is saying in this country that you've got to be able to offer the whole thing to people. You can't just offer bits of it and say these are the green trappings on other people's philosophies.

We have no false claims about the success of the party. Obviously we got a very disappointing vote in the last general election. There were some good things in terms of sympathy and changing ideas but in terms of votes it was very frustrating. But if you look at other areas of green politics in this country you don't get a very different impression. For instance, SERA has been battling away within the labour movement to try to change their ideas for a long long time. I think the more honest ones in SERA would acknowledge that they have had as little success as we have. They haven't even persuaded the Labour Party to end their commitment to nuclear energy.

So what kind of strategy do you envisage for the future? What kind of constituency or base do you see for green politics in this country?

I suspect you ought to say power base really because that's what it comes down to. If you haven't got a power base and if you are not able to stake a claim to power in society you will never be taken seriously. That is a very difficult thing for a lot of ecologists to come to terms with because we are opposed to the exercise of power in society as a means of exploitation and intimidation. To be forced to go too far down the road of power politics in order to be effective would be utterly abhorrent to many of us.

But having said that, there's not much point in being a political party unless you are going to accept a power analysis of society. Now I have great reservations at the moment about whether we have a power base. I think the green movement is largely fictional as an entity in this society. It exists in such a broad range of feelings and strands of thought. Some bits of it are extremely reactionary. If you include certain environmental organisations as part of the green movement then you are tapping deep into that conservative, reactionary heartland of England. Then you go right to the other extreme with groups who may be becoming greener but whose essential focus is still not green. A lot of the peace movement is in

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that position. So the 'green movement' as an entity, as a power base is a problem.

I very much hope that the green movement will grow as it has grown in Germany. I believe we have got a new role to play. It is an ambitious one, and given our performance in the election it may be one we are incapable of fulfilling. We must become part of a new form of opposition to the kind of government we have now. The only way in which one can foresee what is going to happen in the next four or five years is that things will get increasingly difficult. Quite evidently unemployment will not go down. That's for sure. Things will get a lot worse. What are the alternatives that are going to be offered? Although they may make some changes, the major oppositional parties will not change their growth-orientated response which they have been using. To us, therefore, they will be offering a very limited form of opposition, a mirror-image type of opposition, with many different human angles to it, but essentially the same kind of thing. Our job will be to draw together the strands of a new type of oppositional force.

There are a variety of people within different traditions — socialists inside and outside the Labour Party, feminists, peace activists etc — who regard green politics with a great deal of sympathy. Are you hoping these people will look to the Ecology Party as an umbrella organisation, or do you envisage other organisational alliances springing up of which the Ecology Party will be a part?

In all humility I think it will have to be the latter. The idea of the Ecology Party becoming an umbrella organisation is beyond us. I just don't see that we are the organisation that can do that, that can fulfill that role. What I do think is that we will be a very important part of what I hope will be this new growing oppositional force in society.

I would like to think that this oppositional politics will incorporate involvement in elections, will incorporate what we call eco-action, which is direct involvement in all levels of society in actually practising the things which we preach, and it will incorporate non-violent direct action as a very important contribution to our commitment. There will be clashes between people who say that direct action and electoral action are contradictory, and all the rest of it. It will be an alliance that will be incredibly hard to bring together because many people will come in from so many different angles. But unless one can think of building that sort of broader alliance of interests, then I think it is an exceptionally gloomy outlook. As I said before, ecologists have stopped going on about resources running out. What really worries them is that time is running out. □

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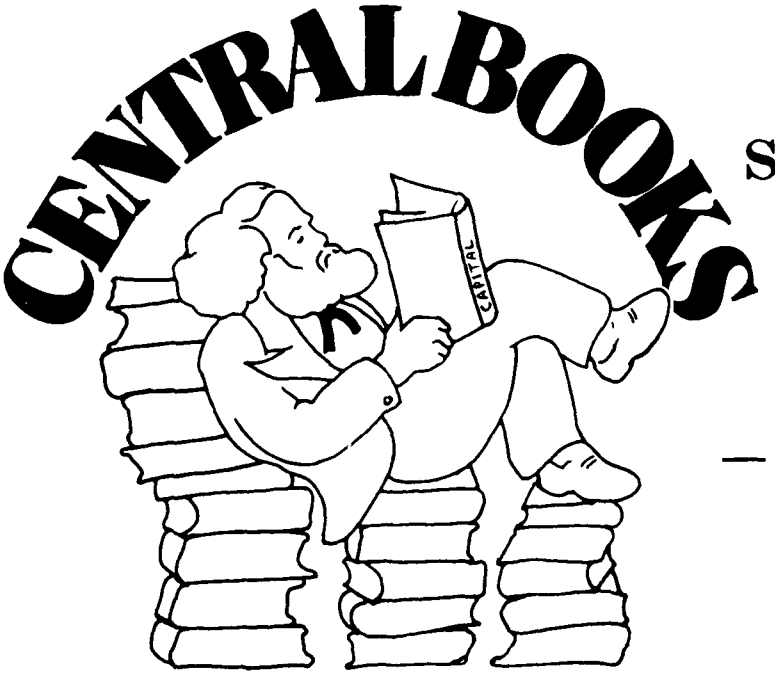

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William Morris remains a neglected figure. Yet his preoccupations can offer the Left much in its present predicament.

Robbie Gray

The Victorian Visionary

WILLIAM MORRIS WAS BORN 150 years ago this month. A man of many talents and activities, and several claims to fame, he is remembered in the labour movement as one of the pioneers of socialism.[1] Morris once described himself, when hauled before the magistrate following incidents at the trial of some comrades, as 'an artist, and a literary man, pretty well known, I think, throughout Europe'.[2] And so he was. Morris was a major figure in Victorian intellectual and cultural life, a well-known poet, artist and designer-craftsman, who made a major contribution to the development of modern design. He was also a courageous and uncompromising social critic, long before he became involved in the socialist movement.

In 1883, at the age of 50, he joined a socialist organisation, the Democratic (soon to become Social Democratic) Federation, adopted socialist ideas, which he always identified with the concepts of Marx as he understood them, and until his early death in 1896, participated, in a series of organisations, in all the activities of the socialist movement of the period. He argued tirelessly for socialism and communism — a label he espoused to distinguish the sort of socialist he was — at street-corners, in lecture-halls, and in articles in the early socialist press.

Like some other members of this first generation of British Marxists, Morris encountered the ideas of Marx relatively late in life — it would have been extremely difficult to encounter them any earlier. Morris thus assimilated Marx's work through an active and critical dialogue with the literary and aesthetic movements to which he belonged, and a long-standing and uncompromising opposition to the moral and aesthetic squalor of Victorian society. These concerns made Morris a kind of *cultural* materialist, seeing culture and aesthetic experience as linked to social relations, long before he, or anyone else in Britain, knew the works of Marx. Reading Marx in the light of these interests, Morris was able to develop Marxism in new directions. These directions have, if anything, become more politically significant in recent years. Yet much discussion of themes foreshadowed in Morris occurs without direct reference to his work.

I wish thank Colin Mercer, John Oakley and Roger Simon for helpful comments on Morris in general, or the draft of this article in particular.

His originality

Morris's 'socialist' writings, which I shall mainly discuss, are only a part of his literary output — the standard *Collected Works* comprise 24 volumes — composed in the last twelve years of an extraordinarily active and creative life. A major figure of Victorian late romanticism, he wrote several long narrative poems during the 1850s, 60s and 70s. These poems evoked medieval and norse themes to establish distance from the social life and assumptions of his own society. Morris's socialist writings comprise various lectures and articles.[3] These are, firstly, lucid and persuasive introductions to the key ideas of Marx; they also, it could be argued, contain flashes of insight that go beyond Marx and develop his ideas significantly. Morris produced two fictional works, directly addressing problems of socialist aspiration and political action, and exploring the links between past, present and future. In *A Dream of John Ball* (1888) the narrator dreams of an encounter with a peasant community during the revolt of 1381, and engages in a long dialogue with the dissident priest and peasant leader John Ball. *News from Nowhere* (1890) is again a dream; the narrator finds himself in a future communist society.[4]

> 'an artist, and a literary man, pretty well known . . . throughout Europe'

Morris's originality as a Marxist rests on the encounter in his mind between literary and aesthetic concerns, and criticisms of Victorian society expressed through them, and the works of Marx. It is not simply that this enables Morris to 'add on' ethical and cultural dimensions absent in Marx. Rather, Morris reads Marx in a way that can expand our understanding of 'material production' and social relations. For Morris production always involves the reproduction of a whole culture, sets of values and forms of social relationship, not just the sphere of 'economic' life narrowly understood. His concern with 'how we live and how we might live' (the title of one of Morris's best-known lectures) leads him to question the aspirations and goals of the socialist movement. He saw, very perceptively, that capitalism could well accommodate and assimilate many of the measures which socialists advocated, and use them to perpetuate its domination. To counter this possibility, Morris emphasises, in his speeches and articles as well as in fictional form in *News from Nowhere*, the goal of a communist society, founded on real equality of condition and radical changes in social relations, values and culture.

An equal and free society

These are challenging questions, and ones which are increasingly on the agenda in the 1980s. Morris was a very early sceptic about the 'forward march of labour'. Most socialists and Marxists of his day emphasised supposed 'scientific laws' of social change, and an inevitable progression to socialism. This reflected the intellectual climate of the late nineteenth century, in which an ideological appropriation of 'science' filled some of the space vacated by religion; nor should Marx and Engels themselves escape some share of blame for this tendency. Morris's cultural formation, and his combative attitude of active opposition to the aesthetic and moral squalor of Victorian society, made him unhappy about mechanistic visions of 'progress'. He felt uneasy about the potential direction of the socialist and labour movement, especially about uncritical endorsement of a 'quasi-Socialist machinery', which would in effect help stabilise capitalism.

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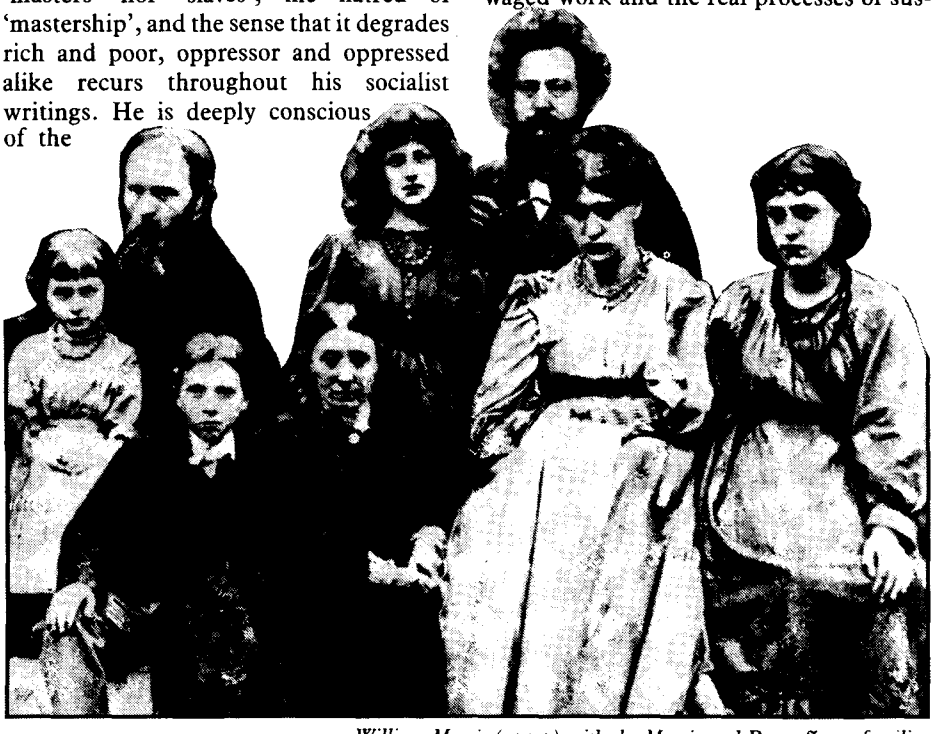
Morris emphasised that the 'machinery' of socialism was perhaps a necessary but never a sufficient condition for a truly equal and free society.

> 'The aim of Communism seems to me to be the complete equality of condition for all people; and anything in a Socialist direction which stops short of this is merely a compromise with the present condition of society, a halting-place on the road to the goal.'[5]

By 'complete equality of condition' Morris means above all a society with neither 'masters' nor 'slaves'; the hatred of 'mastership', and the sense that it degrades rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed alike recurs throughout his socialist writings. He is deeply conscious of the poverty of aspiration of the working class, concerned to foster the desire and the capacity for self-government. The vision of communism as a 'society of equals' is closely linked to Morris's concern with the nature of work and aesthetic pleasure. 'No one will be able to impose degrading forms of labour on others; if such work exists it must be shared.'[6] Morris is not necessarily suggesting that all work will somehow become pleasant and creative, but that both pleasure and drudgery should be equally the lot of all; in these circumstances, conscious decisions about what is or is not worth producing, and for what purpose would become a regulating principle of social life.



William Morris (at top) with the Morris and Burne-Jones families.

Politics of reproduction

The concern with pleasure in work can be linked to interpretations of Marx that emphasise the 'production and reproduction of material life' in the broadest sense of the term. While Marx discusses the process of production as necessarily also a process of reproduction — capital is reproduced and expanded, the wage-labourer is reproduced as a wage-labourer — he does not investigate what occurs in the box labelled 'reproduction of labour-power' in his analytical scheme. With recent developments it has become more and more important to fill that box, and to modify the analytical scheme accordingly. Feminists have raised issues about the relations between the 'formal economy' of full-time waged work and the real processes of sustaining life in the unwaged world of the home. Changes in occupational structure associated with the growth of employment in public services and other 'non-productive' sectors of employment and the consequent recomposition of the working class have also posed challenges. The balance between productive labour, as traditionally understood, in capitalist industry, and the overall process of social reproduction — in the home, in social services and the leisure industries — has been shifting. The 'politics of reproduction', addressed in the women's movement and to some extent in campaigns around health, education and social services, are now a crucial area for the Left.

Theoretical debates around these themes have occurred largely without reference to Morris. But his view of the relations between labour and aesthetic pleasure — or the lack of it — in fact poses the whole question of social reproduction. The forms of labour are related to its actual or anticipated rewards, which are defined by the whole organisation of cultural life.

> 'Nature does not give us our livelihood gratis; we must win it by toil of some sort or degree. Let us see, then, if she does not give us some compensation for this compulsion to labour, since certainly in other matters she takes care to make the acts necessary to the continuance of life in the individual and the race not only endurable, but even pleasurable.'

These compensations take the form of 'hope of rest, hope of product, hope of pleasure in the work itself'.[7]

An all-round tranformation

Any real transformation of social relations — as opposed to the mere 'machinery' of socialism — must address every aspect of social and cultural life. Morris uses the term 'communist' to distinguish this project of total transformation from more narrowly based forms of socialist and labour politics. Like Brecht, Morris sees communism as 'the simple thing, so hard to achieve'. He implicitly challenges mechanical and evolutionist views of the attainment of communism, which suggest that the higher stage of communism will be attained automatically, with the development of productive forces and material abundance under socialism. Morris argues that the decisive factor in the transition to a fully communist society is a change in every sphere of social relations and the moral life of society. In *News from Nowhere* the narrator asks how people have come to achieve the freedom and happiness they enjoy in a communist society:

> '"Briefly," said he, "by the absence of artificial coercion, and the freedom for every man to what he can do best, joined in the knowledge of what productions of labour we really want. I must admit that this knowledge we reached slowly and painfully."'[8]

If *News from Nowhere* has little to say about industrial labour in the familiar sense of the term, and envisages the substitution of smaller-scale self-governing communities for big cities, this is not simply a matter of Morris's own preferences and background — though these are a factor, and one which creates problems, here and elsewhere in his work. It also startles the reader and focuses attention on the character of social relations, rather than the technical conditions

[1] For an account of Morris's life and work, concentrating on the socialist years, see EP Thompson *William Morris* (1955; revised edn 1977).
[2] *Ibid* p469 (1955 edn), or p397 (1977 edn).
[3] For a valuable selection see AL Morton (ed) *Political Writings of William Morris* (1973).
[4] Both these works are available in AL Morton (ed) *Three Works by William Morris* (1973).
[5] *Political Writings* p210.
[6] *Ibid* p152.
[7] *Ibid* pp86-7.
[8] *Three Works* p275.

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of production. A conscious process of cultural and ethical transformation is a necessary element of the struggle to achieve communism.

Morris's unease before the prospect of 'state socialism' or 'semi-demi-socialism' and his assertion that 'true and complete Socialism' is 'what I should call Communism' suggests that this is not simply a matter to be postponed to a post-revolutionary, post-capitalist future. The '*machinery* of Socialism' may lead on to a society of equality, or to a deadlocked compromise in which 'the Society of Inequality might . . . accept the quasi-socialist machinery . . . and work it for the purpose of upholding that society'. The outcome depends on '*how* such reforms were done; in what spirit; or rather what else was being done . . . which would make people long for equality of condition'.[9]

These ideas have, if anything, become more relevant with the intervening years. If they have not been more widely assimilated into the theoretical culture of the Left this is because, as with any major writer, Morris produces texts which are uneven, hinting at developments he does not follow through. It is also because of other barriers which are a function partly of our inability to interpret aspects of Morris, partly of his own limitations.

Utopianism

Morris's writing reflects the literary sensibilities and conventions of the world of the late romantics, in which his own attitudes and style were formed. The evocation of the Middle Ages and the use of an apparently archaic language — in fact, a self-conscious literary device — are aspects of this. Morris also uses the literary device of a dream — eg, in both *John Ball* and *News from Nowhere* — to establish distance from our familiar world and present the vision of a different society. Morris's 'Utopianism' and his 'medievalism' can operate as barriers and obscure the significance of his work.

One problem with utopian literature is that details, which may or may not command the reader's assent, can get in the way. Everyone will have her or his personal quarrel with aspects of the world portrayed in *News from Nowhere*.[10] For example Morris takes as his standard for free and creative labour his own work as a craftsman-designer. Whereas everything else is transformed, this remains remarkably similar, although inserted into different economic relations and universalised through the society. But these disagreements with Morris partly miss the point.

Design for 'Artichoke', an embroidered hanging for Smeaton Manor.

The imagined world is a *personal* vision, and is presented, within the story itself, as such. To describe such a vision, characterised precisely as a dream, is not necessarily to indulge in 'Utopianism' in the pejorative sense castigated by Engels and by the subsequent Marxist tradition. The ability to conceive of a better world is surely at the heart of revolutionary politics, and it is this that Morris wants to elicit from his readers. Imagination and vision, and the ability to communicate them have not always been present in left politics, and it has been a damaging absence.

Medievalism

Morris's interest in the Middle Ages likewise represented — long before he became involved in socialist politics — the possibility of a radically different society. Whatever they meant for other middle class Victorians — including readers of his verse — the Middle Ages meant for Morris the implicit hope that, since things had been different in the past, they might again be different in the future. This is much more than pure 'escapism'. Morris was a 'cultural materialist' long before his encounter with Marx. The medieval world he evokes in *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), his most widely read work among the 'respectable' reading public, is characterised by its variety, sensuousness, and richness of colouring and texture. And this richness is presented as the product of human labour.

> 'And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
> And treasured scanty spice from the far sea,
> Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,'[11]

The world of *News from Nowhere* is similarly varied, rich and coloured. At the beginning of the *Dream of John Ball* Morris evokes the colouring and texture of medieval dress: 'a broad red leather girdle round my waist, on one side of which hung a pouch embroidered very prettily . . .'[12] Morris uses such detailed description to distance us from the world we normally inhabit; but it is a critical distance, not an escapist one.

Morris uses these forms in an attempt to address what he always sees as the crucial issue of the connection between the imagined vision of a better society and immediate struggles: 'free as thou wouldst have them, when thine hope rises the highest, and thou art thinking not of the king's uncles and poll-groat bailiffs, and the villeinage of Essex, but of the end of all, when men shall have the fruits of the earth and the fruits of their toil thereon, without money and without price', the narrator (a modern socialist) addresses John Ball.[13] Both the political essays and the two short novels are written from an experience of frustration, hope deferred and bafflement at the difficulty of establishing such connections.

Notion of the state

While Morris was prescient in seeing the dangers of an uncritical endorsement of state socialism, his response to this is uneven. Nor, probably, could it have been otherwise, given the context in which he thought and acted. At times he hints at a strategy of active intervention and struggle, on the terrain of reforms: 'the ultimate good of it, the amount of progressive force

[9] *Political Writings* pp228-30.
[10] Cf P Anderson *Arguments within English Marxism* (1980) pp166-9.
[11] A Briggs (ed), *William Morris: selected writings and designs* (1962) p.68.
[12] *Three Works* p38.
[13] *Ibid* p110.

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that might be in such things would, I think, depend on *how* such reforms were done'.[14] He also suggests that reforms can give the workers crucial organisational and administrative experience: 'and I hope that no one here will assert that they do not need such training, or that they are not at a huge disadvantage from the lack of it as compared with their masters . . .'[15] This analysis would seem to imply organised working class intervention to infuse reforms with an egalitarian and democratic 'spirit' and to use the spaces they open up to develop the capacity to govern society.

Some such strategy seems to foreshadow current discussion on the Left. Yet Morris himself did not develop these implications; to expect him to do so would be to read him out of his historical context. In common with most Marxists of his time, he sees the state as an 'executive power' set above society, a fortress to be captured, whether by insurrection or a more gradualist electoral strategy. He thus overlooks the capacity of the state to build links with society and bases of popular support — a feature of that very extension of the 'machinery of socialism' he envisaged — and the new areas of struggle created by this process. Morris at times advocated an 'abstentionist' approach — the view that the task of socialist organisations was to 'make socialists' and presumably anticipate some future revolutionary confrontation, meantime avoiding entanglements in electoral politics and the machinery of the existing state. At other times, and especially in his last writings when he was seeking to construct a 'broad left' from the various fragmented and bickering socialist organisations, he accepted electoral activity as a necessary but distasteful stage. He seems always to have considered armed confrontation, in whatever combination with other forms of activity, as a likely feature of the socialist revolution.

> Like Brecht, Morris sees communism as 'the simple thing, so hard to achieve'

Morris thus argues that the 'spirit' in which reforms are implemented is crucial. But he does not develop the implication that this must become an arena for active intervention by the popular forces. The vision of communism tended to be reduced to a matter of propaganda, of fostering some hope of 'the change beyond the change', as he puts it in a memorable phrase in *A Dream of John Ball*. Disconnected in this way from any strategy that could bridge the gap between the present situation and an imagined future, *News from Nowhere* and *A Dream of John Ball* are poignantly sad, as well as deeply inspiring books. In both works the dream form sets up a kind of screen between the narrator and the life he witnesses; he knows he cannot fully share in the struggles of the medieval peasants or the happiness of the people of the future society.

Morris and today

If Morris remains important, it is above all because a politics that addresses 'how we live and how we might live' is now at the top of any serious agenda for socialism. The successful initiative of Thatcherism can, after all, be seen as a response to the crisis of that very arrangement — the operation of some of the 'machinery of Socialism' to reinforce the 'Society of Inequality' — which Morris identified so accurately. Responses in the labour movement — across a spectrum from so-called 'moderates' to the militant Left — have often been defensive and backward-looking, an attempt to restore the class compromises that have broken down, or to install a vision of socialism much like the prosperous capitalism of the 1960s, only without the nasty bits. Such perspectives lack popular credibility. On the other hand, the more open political styles of the women's and peace movements, renewed concern in the unions with problems of internal democracy and an outward-going, alliance-building approach, and the interest in 'cultural politics', are areas of resilience and determination in the face of Thatcherism.

The political challenge of the 1980s is to construct a vision of the immediate to medium-term future, with the persuasive power to inspire and mobilise a broad alliance against Thatcherism. Despite Morris's focus on more instant goals, his work can contribute to this. He exemplifies the importance of imagination and vision in the political struggle, and the need to address social relations, culture and values in every sphere of life. And he makes a stubborn and persistent effort to pose the issue of the connections between immediate struggles and the goal of a free and equal society. Morris was often baffled and rebuffed in his search for such connections; the aim of communism gets pushed towards propaganda and utopian fiction. The political agenda now is very much about forms of organisation and political practice that can bridge the gap between aspiration and reality. Morris uses a phrase about the 'making of socialists' which has been much quoted, often out of context.[16] This has now to be seen in terms of the making of socialism itself, given that social values are bound up with material social relations. Socialists are to be made, not just in the inner life of political organisations, but in forms of popular organisation and participation that demonstrate in practice the attractive power of socialist values, even to people who do not, and perhaps never will want to, see themselves as socialists. Some of the framework for that process is provided by the massive extension of the state Morris saw on the horizon. In extending itself in this way the state does not simply increase its power; it also creates new popular aspirations, new spaces in which to struggle for a different society.

A communist future

Morris — and this is a tragic element in his situation but also a measure of his stature as a Marxist — constantly resists the pressure to marginalise the issue of a communist future, even though he could not always articulate the grounds of his resistance. So far as he was concerned the communist society of equals was the only aim worth struggling for; the alternative was despair. There is an active and insistent aspect of Morris's communism that was in an unresolved tension with the limitations of the socialism he found around him. The root of the matter is the capacity of the working class to govern society and to live without masters:

> Morris was prescient in seeing the dangers of . . . state socialism

> '. . . all but a very small minority are not prepared *to do without masters*. They do not believe in their own capacity to undertake the management of affairs, and to be responsible for their life in this world. When they are so prepared, then Socialism will be realised; but nothing can push it on a day in advance of that time.'[17]

That question remains today, as it was a century ago, the most important one of all for Marxists. It has, if anything, become more pertinent as the 'semi-demi-socialism' Morris envisaged disintegrates in disarray, faced with economic crisis and the political challenge of Thatcherism.

[14] *Political Writings* p228.
[15] *Ibid* p233.
[16] See eg Eric Heffer *Marxism Today* Dec 1983 p51. For the original phrase see *Political Writings* p226.
[17] *Political Writings loc cit.*

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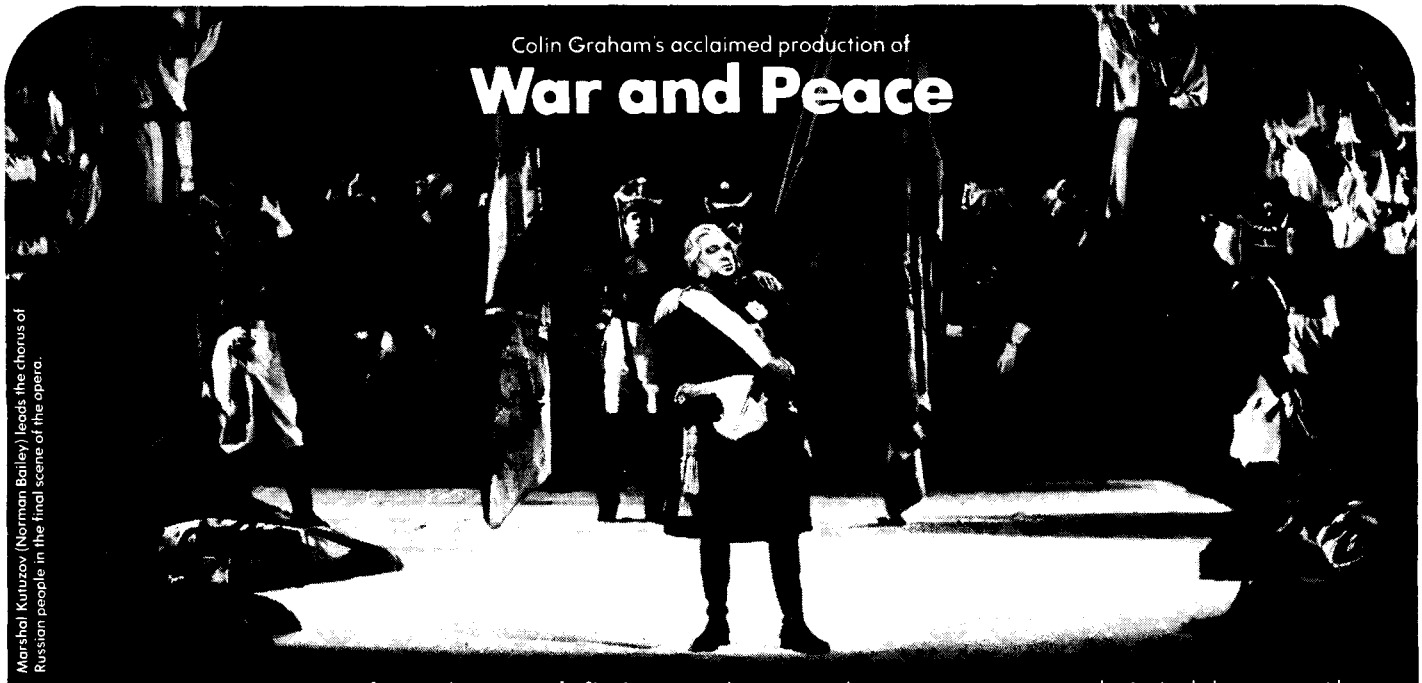

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OPERA'S RISING STAR

Anthony Arblaster

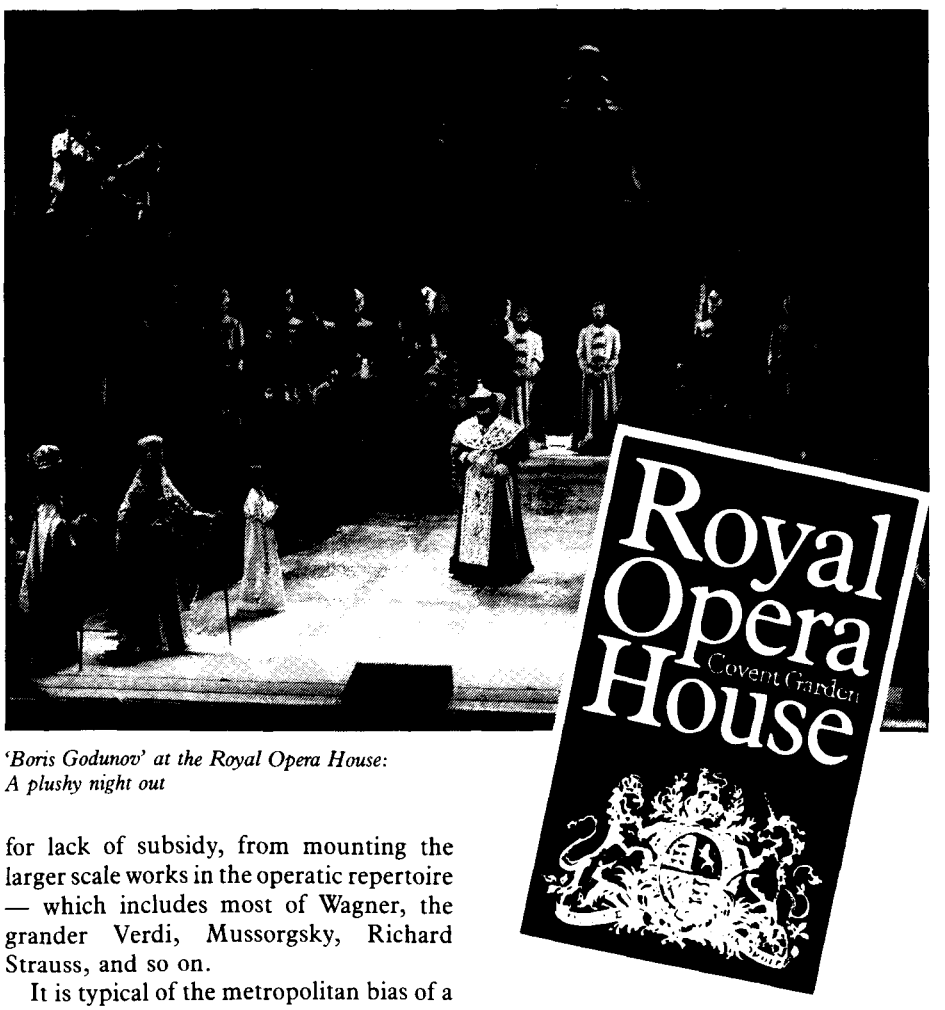
Readers of *Marxism Today*, if they think of 'opera' at all, probably identify it with the kind of event which BBC-2 relayed from Covent Garden on New Year's Eve: an evidently posh, over-dressed audience wildly applauding a farrago of nonsense sung in languages most of them don't understand, with Richard Baker in the intervals chatting to showbiz celebrities in the bar.

But as it happens the Royal Opera House — where the intervals are often as long as the Acts, where visiting business persons are taken for a plushy night out, where the average price of a seat is £16, and only a quarter of the seats cost £7.50 or less — is increasingly unrepresentative of the British opera scene as a whole.

Forty years ago there *was* no such scene. At the end of World War II there were the two London companies, at Covent Garden and Sadlers Wells, while the job of providing professional opera in the rest of the country fell largely to a single touring company, the Carl Rosa.

Gradually companies based outside London began to establish themselves, until today Welsh National Opera (based in Cardiff), Scottish Opera (in Glasgow) Opera North (in Leeds), and Kent Opera, together with a regular autumn tour by Glyndebourne Touring Opera, altogether ensure that Britain outside the capital now sees three opera performances for every two in London. WNO, the most active and successful of these companies, now gives around 140 performances a year (slightly more than the Royal Opera) and sells 150,000 seats. Opera North, set up only just over five years ago, sells in excess of 100,000 seats per year.

What is more, all these companies are committed to touring, which, arduous and complicated as it undoubtedly is, is the only way in which opera can be brought within reach of people in most parts of Britain. Given the well-known reluctance of both the London companies to leave the metropolis, it is clear that the regional companies now have the responsibility of providing opera for most of Britain; and Nicholas Payne, general administrator of Opera North, is quite right to argue that these companies should not be prevented,



'Boris Godunov' at the Royal Opera House: A plushy night out

for lack of subsidy, from mounting the larger scale works in the operatic repertoire — which includes most of Wagner, the grander Verdi, Mussorgsky, Richard Strauss, and so on.

It is typical of the metropolitan bias of a body like the Arts Council that it should have tried to dissuade WNO from mounting Wagner's last opera *Parsifal* last year, apparently on the grounds that it was in the current repertoire at Covent Garden. Yet *Parsifal* had hardly ever been seen outside London before, partly due to its length and the problem of mounting it. WNO's highly successful production was a virtual sell-out in all the five cities where it was performed.

Despite the successes of the regional companies, both in terms of attracting audiences and of the quality of their performances, it looks as if the bias in favour of what are called the 'national' companies, ie, the London ones, is being strengthened. The Priestley Report, on the finances of the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company, has led to the Government agreeing to an increase of £1.6 million in the subsidy for Covent Garden. This is what the 'centres of excellence' approach means in effect: more money being spent in London and second-class status for anything in what are patronisingly known as 'the provinces'.

Yet it is doubtful whether Covent Garden's status in Mrs Thatcher's eyes as a 'centre of excellence' is really deserved. It has a superb orchestra, which plays regularly under most of the best opera conductors in the world. Magnificent individual singing performances can often be heard there. And that, of course, is what people go there for. But as for hearing and seeing coherent, thoughtful and integrated performances of the works themselves — that is another matter. It is sometimes splendidly achieved, as with the revival of

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Berg's *Lulu* and the new production of *Boris Godunov* in the present season. But more often the ceaseless coming and going of the international 'stars', and the generally timid and conventional production policy, make for patchy performances and ultimately unsatisfying experience of the work itself.

This is where the other British companies have been able to score their most striking successes in recent years. Unable to hire the world's most expensive singers, they have opted instead to make the most of their relative poverty. Being able to work for longer rehearsal periods with less costly performers, what they have, at best, achieved is integrated ensemble performances of carefully thought-out and well rehearsed interpretations of 'the work as a whole'. In this style of work, much depends upon the producer, and it is these companies, in particular Welsh National Opera, and, especially since David Pountney arrived, English National Opera, who have adopted the most enterprising policies as far as production is concerned.

And since opera audiences, and even more, opera critics, are a fairly conservative lot, it is not surprising that these developments have been greeted with much protest and grumbling. The pages of the monthly magazine, *Opera*, founded, ironically, by the present managing director of ENO, Lord Harewood, but edited for many years past by Harold Rosenthal, are littered with complaints about the 'tyranny' and 'megalomania' of today's producers. All this means, for the most part, is that the established opera critics are hardly used to seeing opera produced, in any genuine theatrical sense, at all. Some of them, it is clear, would actually prefer to listen with their eyes shut.

Often there has been a barely suppressed vein of political resentment in this grumbling. Some of the producers whose work has aroused controversy come from Eastern Europe, and in particular from East Germany. Two of them, Götz Friedrich and Joachim Herz, had worked with the legendary Walter Felstestein at the Komische Opera in East Berlin, and a third, Harry Kupfer, is now Opera Director there.

Not all of their work is manifestly political, but Kupfer's production of *Fidelio* — the most political opera ever written — for WNO aroused the ire of the reactionaries, while Herz's *Madame Butterfly*, also for WNO, was probably the only production ever seen in Britain to treat the work as anything more than a rather sickly and picturesque tear-jerker. Friedrich was brought to Covent Garden as Principal Producer by Colin Davis, but apart from his magnificent and expensive *Ring* cycle (which has already been shelved), produced only three other operas there. It seems he was defeated by the ingrained artistic conservatism of the ROH.

Political and artistic radicalism do not necessarily go together, and some of the more inventive producers, like Pountney and Andrei Serban, seem more interested in exploring the psychological dimension than the political. But that too belongs to the air of adventure which is blowing through the world of opera in Britain today. Audiences are growing, and they are eager to see new productions and unfamiliar works. Standards of performance and production are higher than they were even ten years ago, and the central role of the producer as the creative interpreter of the work as a whole is increasingly recognised and accepted. If there is one company whom we have to thank for that more than any other, it is Welsh National Opera, whose best work continues to set standards by which that of the other British companies has to be judged.

LIGHT DIMENSIONS

Michael Cross

'Already it is accepted that the laser is the tool of the twenty-first century: holography is its vision.' So reads the organiser's introduction to the latest hi-tech exhibition of holographic images to hit London. And visitors to *Light Dimensions*, at the Science Museum until early this month, are not likely to forget that they're experiencing what we've been told to expect from a brave new world in which art and technology fuse in a lifestyle dominated by the microprocessor. High technology is back in fashion, and holography with its almost obligatory 'space-age' music and sci-fi subject matter, is all set to cash in.

It is an appealing formula which has little to do with holography as an art form. The lasting impression of visitors to the exhibition is of anxious parents trying to keep their children up-to-date with new technologies which the adults don't understand. It's the same phenomenon as the fears that boost sales of home computers; fears of being 'left behind', which the computer industry is quick to exploit in its advertising. Holography is so inextricably caught up with this image that it is important to remind ouselves that it is neither a particularly new medium, nor one that necessarily involves space-age technology.

A hologram is simply an image stored on an old-fashioned glass photographic plate. But instead of recording a direct photographic image, a hologram records a pattern formed by the interaction between two sources of light: one reflected from the subject of the hologram, the other a pure 'reference beam'. This pattern is called an interference pattern, which is formed whenever waves travelling in different directions meet each other. Think of the pattern of waves that form when you drop two stones simultaneously a yard apart into a pool of still water. Light waves, of course, travel far faster and have far higher frequencies than waves in water, so when they interact they form far more complex patterns. In a hologram, these patterns store a 3-dimensional image on a photographic plate. When the plate is developed, and illuminated in the right way, the image reappears hanging apparently in front of — or behind — the plate.

High technology comes in because only very pure light, in which all the waves travel together, can create interference patterns. The only practical source of such light is a laser beam. The idea of creating three-dimensional images in this way dates back to 1947, but it took the invention of the laser in 1960 to make it a practical process. Nowadays lasers are conventional industrial tools, and at the low powers needed to make holograms you can forget about death rays.

So what is all the fuss about? For a start, holograms can be pretty, and the three-

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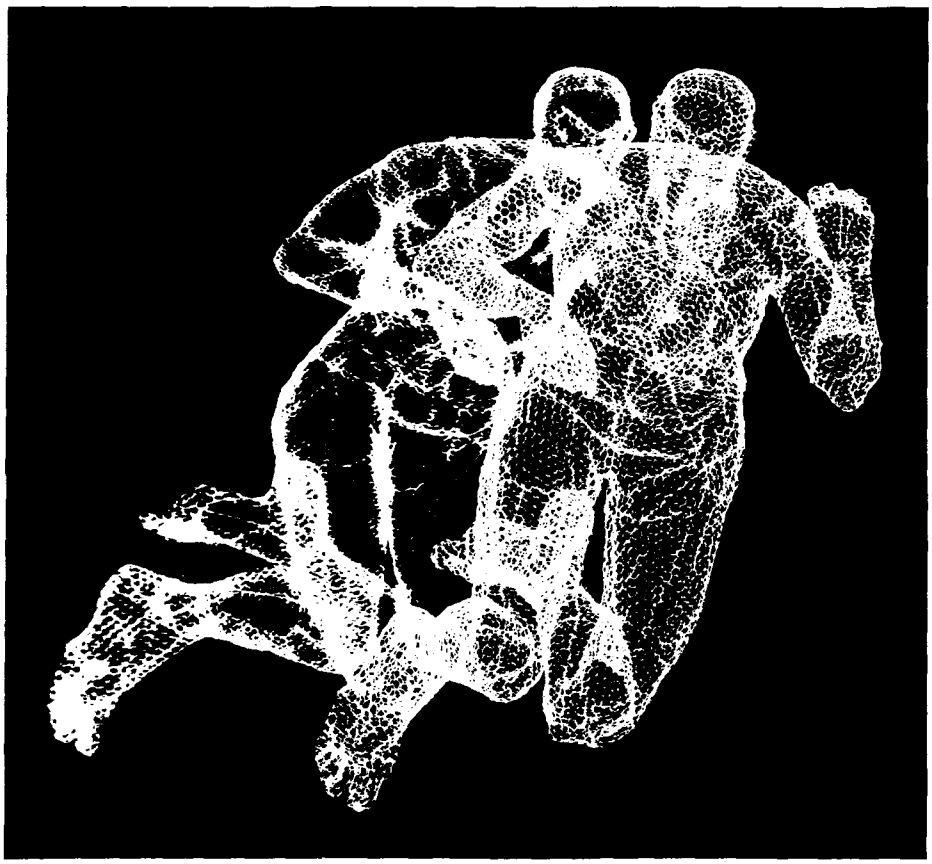

Hologram by Edwina Orr

dimensional effect is intriguing at first. It does take a while to get over the urge to touch the ghostly image hanging in mid air. And a lot of artists, in the US, Europe and Japan, are excited by holography's possibilities. But the medium has a more serious, and potentially sinister role as an industrial and military tool. A whole section of the exhibition covers this aspect of holography, and gives a clue to the reality behind the hype. Rolls-Royce makes holograms of jet engines to find out how they wear out, the Central Electricity Generating Board examines holograms to fuel elements that are too radioactive to handle and now British Telecom's cardphone (those annoying phone booths that don't accept money) work by reading holographic patterns on the cards. British Telecom's blurb tells us depressingly 'In the not too distant future the coinbox telephone will be obsolete and replaced by the cardphone.' Fine for the executive on the move; but what if you're unemployed, a pensioner, or use public phones only once in a blue moon?

It is also significant that perhaps the most technically impressive hologram in the show — at least as an accurate three-dimensional recreation of an original object — is of a 'head-up display', made by Marconi Avionics, which allows fighter pilots to fly close to the ground in the dark. It works by projecting an image of the ground as seen by infra-red cameras holographically in front of the pilot's face. He flies, 'head up', just as he would in daytime.

Neither is holography free of the taint of big business. Patents that cover the process are firmly in the hands of Citibank and the People's Bank of Seattle, which took control when the previous holder, Holosonics, went bankrupt. In 1980, Atari, the Space Invaders giant, spent millions of dollars licensing the technology to use in a video game, and threatened to sue any competitor foolish enough to try to get in on the act. As it happened, Atari got its fingers burnt: its holographic 3D video game failed to catch on, and interest in the amusement industry has now shifted to games such as Dragons Teeth, in which the player 'interacts with' (ie, slices up) full-colour cartoon movies stored in a video disc. But with so much money tied up, it is hard to imagine the big corporations letting the patent rights go.

So how do artists survive in this cut-throat world? It is possible — just — for someone with basic technical skills and a knowledge of photography to make holograms at home. (The main requirement is a large table absolutely free of vibration, preferably in a basement.) But many of the medium's leading artists have worked either comfortably or otherwise with big money. Some do very nicely making holograms as advertising displays or as corporate sculptures. Others try to take holography beyond the superficial images that commercial backers usually look for. But if the work in the artists' section of the exhibition is anything to go by, the artists still have a long way to go. Some of the work descends into the realm of gimmickry; in other pieces it is hard to see what purpose holography serves. Only in the more abstract images does the medium look as if it is coming into its own.

The conventional explanation is that holography is a new medium, and has yet to develop. 'What we see here is the first 36 years of holography. Imagine what the next 120 years will bring,' writes Eve Ritscher, the exhibition's organiser, in the introduction to the catalogue. But if holography really is in its infancy, why the self-conscious attempts to identify it as art? The catalogue makes great play of the fact that Salvador Dali worked with holography (although the exhibition features none of his work); why the need to involve a 'recognised artist' for a seal of respectability?

There are also questions surrounding the organisation of the exhibition itself. *Light Dimensions* is clearly a commercial venture — sponsors include the *Standard* newspaper and firms that make holographic materials — and there is a hefty entrance fee of £1.75. Would the Science Museum have thought holography worth an exhibition without this backing?

The questions uncover conflicts — not necessarily unhealthy ones — in holography between art and business, between applied science and aesthetics. The reality is that a hologram of a turbine blade has little in common with one made for art's sake, and that exhibiting them together under a 'high-tech' umbrella belittles both aspects of the technology.

One lasting memory of *Light Dimensions* was a matronly grandmother holding up a small child to see a hologram from the correct angle, then realising it showed a pair of naked buttocks. 'I don't think you'll like this one,' the grandmother said firmly, putting the child down. When holography has learned how to cope with that kind of problem, it will really have arrived.

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Spotlight

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Malcolm Barry

The two most striking aspects of the development of British 'classical' contemporary music since 1945 have been, first, the increasing role of the state in its patronage (albeit through quangos) and, second, the increasing Europeanisation of its production. Since the first is mostly concerned with dissemination and this is designed to be a review of production it will suffice to say that the importance of the score (ie the published piece of music) and, therefore, firms of publishers has declined in favour of commission opportunities and performances and, thus, grant-giving bodies, principally the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Not that this made the production — the actual music — any more intelligible to the lay listener or any more 'democratic' in the widest sense, and this relates to the second factor mentioned above. Immediately prior to and following the Second World War, British music was introverted to the point of provincialism, in the old sense, with little regard for the developments in musical language that had taken place in Europe up to half a century before. The academic climate — the teaching of composers — reflected this dreary reaction. Schoenberg, arguably the most influential classical musician of the century, was effectively turned away from Britain by academe, despite being a refugee: there are many examples of promising young British composers of the 1950s being obliged to complete their training abroad to escape the stultifying influence of the British conservatoires.

Today this has largely changed: Britain is a part of Western Europe in respect of contemporary music and partakes of that music's languages, problems and opportunities. But this development coincides with a crisis in that same contemporary music.

Peter Maxwell Davies

150 year cycles seem to have dominated the history of music and, by 1900, the possibility of meaningful development of tonality — the musical language of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries and of 20th century popular music — appeared remote to many composers. Schoenberg introduced an organising system (albeit highly artificial) analogous to this: the twelve-note method, in which all twelve chromatic (semi-tones in the octave) notes were used and in which none of these was repeated before all other eleven had been sounded so that none achieved a hierarchical priority.

After the horrors of the Third Reich, avant-garde European composers came to believe that the residual romanticism in Schoenberg's music was a compromise and extended his procedures of pitch to the other areas of music (eg, rhythm), and thus piled artifice on artifice. This total serialism, in which system was all, soon produced its antithesis, symbolised by the work of John Cage, whose compositions after 1945 attempt to 'bypass the Will' by means of notational dances, chance elements and simple abdication of composers' responsibilities.

While both extremes had their followers in Britain and many composers went through phases embracing both attitudes, the most significant thing is the end that this opposition represented to musical development in simple technical terms. For, now, 'anything goes': any technical means, any organisation. There was thus no possibility of a technically based avant-garde or of 'progress' in a field that had always been 'progressive' in terms of its techniques.

British composers from the 1960s on have been as much aware of this 'steady state' as their European or American counterparts and the interest in the field lies in their reactions to it. Peter Maxwell Davies, for example, began writing strictly serial music and then moved towards expressionistic music theatre. Of late and under the influence of his adopted native Orkney, his style has simplified, on the one hand to a sort of 'community-type' music and, on the other, in his concert works to a style in which tonality once again has a role to play.

Harrison Birtwistle has always tended to pursue his own path and often seems to be trying to set aside centuries of European music and start again from first principles. *Verses for Ensembles*, a tough but rewarding piece, provides an excellent introduction to his music. Of the older generation, Michael Tippett and Alan Bush have remained open-eared and open-minded while not embracing the farther reaches of contemporary techniques. Both have evinced serial concerns in their music, a comparative rarity in this field whose practitioners and commentators often pretend that the real world does not exist.

All these composers had come to maturity by the mid-60s: what was striking

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at that time was the reaction of slightly younger musicians to the crisis mentioned above. What was then the 'avant-garde' — Cornelius Cardew and David Bedford — realised that contemporary classical music was talking to itself and both drastically simplified their approaches in the quest for communication, Cardew adopting outrightly explicit politics as an impetus for his music, while Bedford pursued a dual career as a rock musician and elements from that world formed an integral part of his compositions.

On the other hand there were those composers who seemed to follow Schoenberg's dictum 'if it is for the masses, it is not art and if it is art it is not for the masses'. Brian Ferneyhough, in particular, writes music of fearful forbidding complexity, often self-defeating in its incomprehensibility but nevertheless possessed of a rhetorical power equalled only by Birtwistle: *Transit*, by Ferneyhough, is a relatively accessible way in to this fevered over-intellectualism.

Of younger composers still Oliver Knussen seems set to become the most prominent of his generation while George Benjamin is also spoken highly of: a Scottish composer, Edward McGuire, is also capable of bridging the gap between advanced techniques and a sympathetic audience.

Harrison Birtwhistle conducting a new music group at The Cockpit.

There is a vast amount of production of new music but the most salient feature of it remains the gap between the composer and his or her audience. This gap, opened by Schoenberg, does not seem to be lessening: perhaps, though, it is comforting for British composers to know that, in being fully part of Europe, they are not alone in sitting in it.

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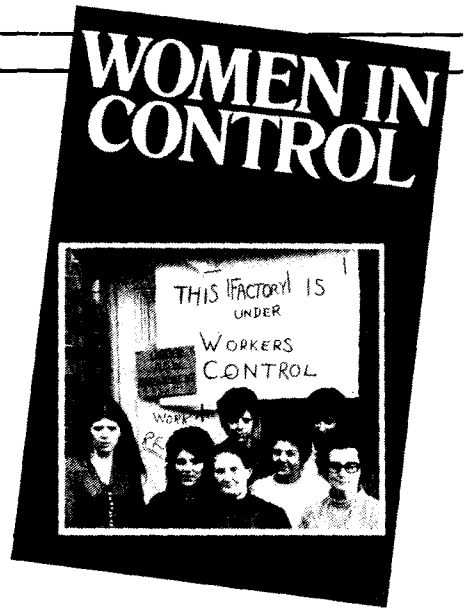
REVIEWS



WOMEN IN CONTROL: DILEMMAS OF A WORKERS CO-OPERATIVE

Judy Wajcman
Open University Press
ISBN 0 335 101933

This is a depressing book but an honest one. The author looks without false sentiment at the failure of a women's co-operative, both to prosper and to radicalise the women involved in it. Judy Wajcman was a participant observer at Fakenham enterprises in 1975, working with women at jobs that ranged from folding and packing products to collecting their children from school. Gradually she pieced together the story and the relationships that unfolded within it.

Fakenham is a small country town in Norfolk where job openings are few and unpleasant. About 50 women were employed in the local show factory, a satellite of a Norwich firm for whom it functioned as a 'closing room', sewing shoe uppers. In 1972 the firm went bankrupt and the factory was to be scrapped.

The women decided to occupy the plant and organise a work-in. The unions, ASTMS and NUFLAT, were not enthusiastic. 'Unable to assume a conventional role, the union had no role at all within the enterprise.' Nonetheless, some of the women maintained the occupation for 18 weeks, while they looked for a backer to buy the factory and continue the business of making shoes.

At this point, the Scott Bader Commonwealth Ltd, a pioneer worker co-operative, came to the rescue, injected a little (too little) capital, and helped the women to set up a co-op along lines evolved by the Industrial Common Ownership Movement. The Board of Directors comprised three nominees of Scott Bader and three of the women. The co-op was named Fakenham Enterprises.

Then followed a long hard slog to obtain work. Turning the firm co-operative could not alter its relationship to the market. Having neither the capital nor the managerial and marketing skills to go into business with their own product, Fakenham had to remain dependent on contract work for bigger firms. They branched out from shoe uppers to other leather goods and garments.

Scott Bader, it seems, were never very happy with the women's aspirations for true collectivism and self-management. This went beyond the ICOM principle which was more accurately 'worker participation in management'. They put pressure on the women to subordinate principle to becoming profitable fast. They put in a (male) manager who rode rough-shod over the women's democracy. They urged acceptance of a take-over which the women refused to agree to. Eventually they cut their losses and withdrew.

By 1975, Fakenham, for want of other work, had become so heavily dependent on sub-contract orders for one firm that the women were little more than home-workers gathered under one roof. They even had to give in finally to piece payment. The co-op enterprise had folded by 1977.

Judy Wajcman tells a story in which the women are recognisable, their characters and contradictions clearly understood. She got to know their home life, the full extent of the 'double shift' each went home to complete in her own kitchen. She interviewed husbands and was told by many that they felt their wives were silly to accept the insecurity, the long hours and the low pay for the mere illusion of independence. It was better, they said, to let a boss take the risks — a conclusion later reached by the 'Lee Jeans' women in Scotland. What the women needed, some of the men said, was a man as manager.

The result of this defeated attempt at autonomy was that the women's political perspectives were unchanged. They had never reckoned much to the unions, now they reckoned less. Few had had much confidence in their own ability to manage — now they knew they were right. They still (by and large) thought and voted Tory, still deferred to the authority of their husbands. They had been destroyed by the capitalist and patriarchal system they had tried to flout — but it felt as though they were to blame for the failure.

Judy Wajcman's conclusions are tough. 'Co-operatives are not a panacea. Naively embarked upon, they cannot provide more than a temporary alternative and are as likely to inhibit as to develop consciousness . . . Shifting responsibility for a firm's viability onto the workers increases the potential for demoralisation.' These conclusions have been criticised by some in the co-operative movement.

My own conclusions from the story would be rather different. That working women should try, even if in the long run they fail, to take their economic chances into their own hands and engage for a while in a different kind of struggle, not with the boss but with the market, should surely not be discouraged. The women would have been out of work altogether without this initiative. *They* chose, we have to respect the choice. I wish it had been possible in the book to point towards some ways out of the dilemma of the Fakenham women. It would be helpful to explore the irreducible minimum conditions and expectations for experiments of this kind. For we surely have to have such fall-back positions within our range of options.

It is as though Judy Wajcman feels there is some other, imminent political moment about to come in women's lives that will *really* have the potential of changing their consciousness, so long as the possibility has not already been squandered on an unsuccessful 'co-operative' venture. I doubt myself that there is such a moment about to dawn, for which our consciousness must be kept in seed form ready to germinate and flower. Where I agree with Judy Wajcman's conclusions is in anger at the imposition of male managerial and financial 'talent' as the price of the left intellectual support. That indeed does make you feel like being shot of the whole 'co-op' ethic.

Cynthia Cockburn

THE LEFT AND THE EROTIC

Eileen Phillips (ed)
Lawrence and Wishart £3.95pbk £8.95 hbk
ISBN 3531 55836

SEX AND LOVE

Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan (eds)
Women's Press £4.95 pbk
ISBN 07043 39137

An alarming trend is developing. Erstwhile feminists are beginning to rewrite history. We have had Betty Friedan, American author of *The Feminine Mystique* arguing in her new book, *The Second Stage*, that feminists should admit to having gone not

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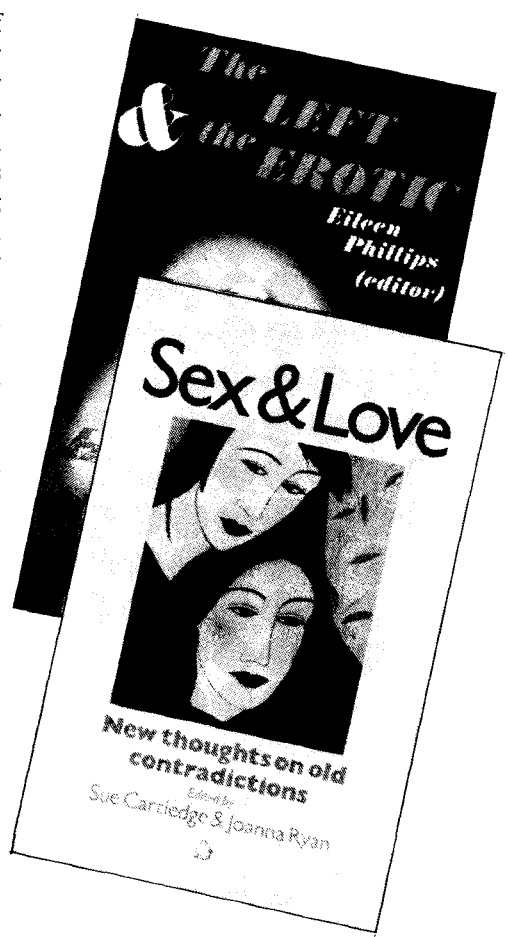
only far enough, but too far, in demanding equality with men in the public sphere. We should, according to Friedan, re-emphasise what many would see as traditional female qualities such as caring and gentleness, and direct our efforts to creating the social forms which enable both men and women to develop these virtues. She writes as though feminists have not always recognised that we must change men as much as women; that we must assert women's rights to public and economic power and status *without* submitting to the aggression, competitiveness and denial of the personal sphere which men exhibit in the pursuit of that power and status.

More recently, Germaine Greer in the pages of the *Sunday Times* has presented a caricature of feminism. 'The truth is', says Greer, 'that we *are* being manipulated by the promotion and commercialisation of sex that (Mary Whitehouse) finds so repulsive. This is what we call liberation.' So much, then, for years of feminist campaigns against the exploitation of women's bodies in advertising, so-called beauty competitions and pornography. So much for our less publicised struggles to develop new ways of relating to each other which challenge the commercialisation of sex without slipping back into the prudery and moralism characteristic of Mary Whitehouse's campaigns and pronouncements. Because of the status of Greer and Friedan as self and media appointed gurus of feminism, we should take their writing seriously and organise our arguments in opposition. There are still too many people, including people on the Left, waiting to dismiss feminism as a freakish off-shoot of the permissive 60s.

Within this context *Sex and Love*, a collection of new essays published by the Women's Press and *The Left and the Erotic*, essays based on contributions to a workshop at The Moving Left Show in October 1982, are very welcome and useful. Both recognise the problems which allow Friedan and Greer to retreat from whatever commitment to feminism they might once have had: the mistakes the women's movement has made in assuming too simple a connection between the personal and the political, and in not recognising the complexity of desire; and the changes in the wider political climate which can be used to force sexuality off the political agenda altogether and which make us feel less confident about, and more isolated in, our commitment to sexual politics. As Noel Greig puts it in *The Left and the Erotic*, we can no longer take comfort from 'the invigorating sense of being part of a broad, progressive movement which embraced gender and class, music, political activism, love and revolt . . . that sense of 'convergence', the feeling that great changes were to happen. . .' But both books propose that reassessment and refinement are called for rather than retreat and revision.

They speak forcefully of the possibility of change and the potential of pleasure. They reject tendencies evident in some recent feminist work to equate heterosexual sex with intractable sexism or to reduce lesbianism to feminism with sex as a more or less optional and de-eroticised extra. They contain testaments to actual change. But both books also reflect the political climate of the sober 80s, particularly in their retreat from the polemical style which has characterised much previous feminist writing on sexuality. This shift is important. Lynne Segal is perhaps too hard in *Sex and Love* on the 'crass and simplistic' psychology of Masters and Johnson and on those feminist books which use this research to celebrate the clitoris as the site



of female pleasure. But she, and the other writers who take up the same theme, are surely right to suggest that by emphasising the biological possibility of female sexuality without *also* understanding the complexity of desire, we have sometimes come close to foreclosing an area of exploration which is important for us, within our individual lives and in our wider attempts to formulate a politics of sex. Lynne Segal argues that rather than celebrating the power of women's sexuality 'it would be more helpful for us to understand why it is so very, very *hard* for us to change our erotic life, even when we consciously desire to.' This recognition, however, is only a starting point and both books suggest a range of strategies, theoretical and practical, by which we might move beyond this.

Having marshalled our arguments, however, or at least having outlined some of the parameters, what are we going to do with them? Their implications for our individual lives seem clear. Certainly I felt challenged and changed and clearer as a result of reading these two books, not least because both refuse to lay down a political line but recognise that sexual and personal experience is variegated, and change is not merely a question of will power or rational political choice.

What about the implications for collective politics? Elizabeth Wilson touches on this question in her contribution to The Left and the Erotic. She argues convincingly that there may be more than we previously thought to Freud's estimation of romantic love as 'a neurotic compulsion'. That formulation explains something of the force which romantic desires have in our own lives and the way in which, more generally, romantic desire reappears in new forms in sub-cultures ostensibly built on opposition to romanticism. Does this mean that some aspects of sexuality, like growth or the ageing process are 'a kind of bedrock of human experience around which politics develops but which are not, in themselves, inevitably political'? In fact what, if anything, is the relationship of politics to emotions?

Elizabeth Wilson herself appears to think that the connection is fairly tenuous. Since romanticism is not necessarily either good or bad, since there is no 'correct line', she concludes that 'in pursuing the demon lover through the recesses of the psyche we shall not regenerate Marxism nor discover better forms of political practice . . . we may come to have less grandiose visions of what the political can accomplish and cease

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to denounce all politics which does not promise us Utopia.' What concerns me about this conclusion are two assumptions upon which it implicitly rests. The first is that sexuality is peculiar, not in the *extent* of its resistance to rationality, but in exhibiting resistance at all. But my experience is that in acting politically women and men on all sorts of issues make choices which don't necessarily correspond to a predictable and objective logic. The failure of the Left to recognise this has led us to ignore some issues which matter to people because they don't fit easily into our 'scientific' schema. It has also, on other issues, led us into sterile sloganising or obscurantist arguments. The second assumption is that feminism is a politics of the personal and subjective whilst Marxism is the science of the objective and reasoned. From where I stand this is not only to marginalise feminism by a process of compartmentalisation. It is also to reduce Marxism to its economic objectives rather than to recognise that these are no more (nor less) than means to an end which is the transformation of social relations, including those which are most personal and intimate.

Other contributions to the books draw different conclusions from Elizabeth Wilson. Some draw no conclusions. We are still at a very early stage in our attempts to relate emotion and politics. What emerges strongly from both books however is that socialist feminists, and the Left more generally, need to pay much more attention to this area. And anyone who is serious about personalising politics should read these books.

Tricia Davis

IN THE TRACKS OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

Perry Anderson
Verso £16 hbk £4.95 pbk
ISBN 0 86091 776 2

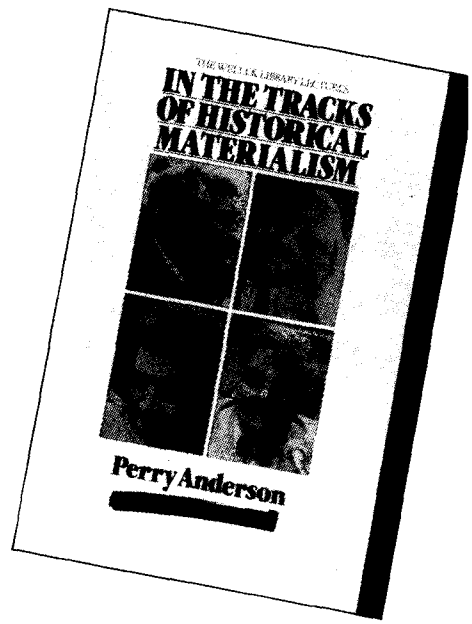
Amidst the proliferation of books orientated on Marxism and relating to specific disciplines, there is the danger of not seeing the Marxist wood for the trees. It is, therefore, important and useful to have a panoramic view of recent developments in Marxism which reveals trends and problems.

Perry Anderson in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* undertakes just such an examination. The book is based on lectures he gave on the theme of Critical Theory at the University of California at Irvine. Its cerebral character and presentation is tuned to an élite rather than the wider spectrum of those interested in Marxism. While not an easy read, a journey through it is rewarding, especially because the investigation encompasses both the historical background to trends in Marxism and the inner tensions and problems within Marxism which have influenced its development.

The book is in part a retrospective assessment of the conclusions and predictions of his *Considerations on Western Marxism*, but is primarily concerned with changes in the political and geographical landscape of Marxism in the Western world from the mid-70s to the present day. Commenting on his past conclusions he indicates that in the main they have been borne out by events and that, indeed, 'the grand Western Marxist tradition — with its epistemological or aesthetic, sombre or esoteric tonalities — has effectively come to an end and in its stead there has emerged, with remarkable celerity and confidence, another kind of Marxist culture. . .' What then are some of the salient features of the changes in the landscape of Marxism? An overall feature is an appetite for the concrete, expressed in confronting questions of contemporary capitalism — of economics and of social and political structures, thus advancing theoretical work in previously neglected areas, such as the state.

Geographically, Anderson points to a shift in the centre of gravity of Marxist culture from Latin-speaking Europe, particularly France, to the English-speaking countries of Britain and, in a more restricted way, North America. In this context he highlights the contribution of Marxist historians in Britain, already formidable in the 50s and consolidated in the past ten years, both in the range of important works and in the bridging of the gap between historiography and philosophy. He observes that since the publication of Edward Thompson's *Poverty of Theory* it is impossible for Marxists to proceed as if 'their history and their thoery were two separate mental worlds.'

To discover why Marxism, which had dominated the French intellectual scene since the Liberation, was usurped by structuralism, Perry Anderson embarks on an excursion into structuralism and post-structuralism, which he dissects trenchantly. In the course of this, some observations are made about Althusserianism which, even in its zenith, 'was always



constituted in an intimate and fatal dependence on a structuralism that both preceded it and would survive it'. He concludes that the limitations of structuralism and its inability to make the connection between structure and subject in the historical process is not a serious challenge to a confident historical materialism and could not alone account for the recession in Marxism's influence in France.

He locates the main reason for the decline in its fortunes in the impact of the vicissitudes of the international communist movement and the consequent tensions and trends — the trauma resulting from the Soviet Union's intervention in Czechoslovakia, the disastrous outcome of the Cultural Revolution in China, the high hopes of Eurocommunism and the failure to realise them.

In his view the impact on Marxism was sharpest in those countries of Latin Europe where the mass Communist Parties presented a formidable threat to the existing system, and he terms the crisis of Marxism a 'regional crisis'. In other capitalist countries, like Britain, the situation was different, since there had never been mass Communist Parties to attract the same hopes.

While there is considerable substance in what Perry Anderson has to say about the shock of events affecting the international communist movement and its internal schisms, it is doubtful if his explanation of the differences in the state of Marxism is adequate. Furthermore, the vigour and influence of Marxism cannot be viewed solely from within an academic circuit. If placed in a nation-wide terrain, the picture takes on a somewhat different colour. For

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despite setbacks in countries like Italy, the mass influence of Marxism contrasts sharply with its restricted impact on Britain, and even more so with North America.

When he pursues his analysis of Eurocommunism and its strategy he opens himself up to challenge and criticism. Eurocommunism is treated as if it is a monolithic phenomenon. Hence there is no delineation of its development which reveals specific features and actual differences in policy and approach of the Communist Parties concerned. He dates its real genesis from the invasion of Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt that 1968 had its influence, but the historical roots of what has come to be known as Eurocommunism strike much further back into the past. There is the heritage of Gramsci and, since Gramsci, the writings of Togliatti and others.

The strategies adopted by a number of West European Communist Parties are the outcome of a process. The problem they have confronted has been how to achieve the hegemony of the working class under conditions of advanced capitalism and make possible a fundamental change in the power relationship. Perry Anderson's characterisation of the trajectory of these strategies is also disputable. He says that while Eurocommunism presented itself as a third road between Stalinism and Social Democracy, its 'actual practice came to seem merely a repetition of the mournful route back into capitalism of the Second International'.

That there have been failures and setbacks is not in question, but these do not of themselves render a strategy incorrect. My comments do not in any way discount the need for a critique, but any such critique should surely be engaged in the context of the actual conditions within each country, the class relationships and the problems of the struggle. Perry Anderson's schematic treatment seems to be out of joint with his own adherence to and championship of historical materialism and its methodology.

While the thrust of his criticism is directed at the strategies of Communist Parties, he also criticises, in a lower key, the failure of the Trotskyist movement to realise the 'the alternative tradition of revolutionary Marxism', citing Portugal as an illustration. He, himself, does not project an alternative strategy and he concludes his considerations of strategy by saying that it is the sphinx facing Marxism in the West.

His book is rounded off by some interesting and thought-provoking points about the shape of challenges to the further development of historical materialism as we see out the 20th century, and with some ideas about the relationship between Marxism and Socialism. He predicts that the relation between human society and nature will be a growing challenge. And, indeed, the development of the women's, peace and ecological movements are all in their particular ways, placing the problem on the theoretical agenda. In discussing briefly the question of Marxist theory and socialism he outlines areas for research and debate, which include the political structure of a socialist democracy and the problem of abolishing class and gender inequalities.

Whatever reservations and criticisms one may have of parts of the book, as a whole it is a valuable and stimulating contribution to the ongoing debate about the development of Marxism.

Betty Matthews

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VIEWPOINT

Feminism is not being ignored by the Left, just marginalised. Below, two responses to the articles by Tricia Davis (October) and Jean Gardiner (February).

Feminism in 1984

KATHY MYERS
Masculinity under threat

In Tricia Davis' article 'Feminism is Dead? Long live feminism' (MT Oct 83) she examines the credibility of feminism in the current political arena. In Davis' opinion, Tory ideology has ironically embraced many of the demands and characteristics of feminism whilst the Left has retreated from them, regarding 'women's oppression as a subsection of class oppression.'

In conclusion she puts forward three options. First that the Tory attempt to appropriate feminism should be taken seriously. Second, that the Left should learn from feminist debates, and finally, that there is an imperative to develop a feminist economic strategy.

As Davis points out, the feminist debate makes good economic and political sense from a socialist point of view: yet the Left has consistently 'ignored', 'marginalised' or rendered 'irrelevant' feminist arguments. But why should this be? Davis has two possible scenarios. First that the Left genuinely regards 'the women's question' as subordinate to the class struggle. Alternatively the Left (specifically Labour) has been myopic in its political vision: 'uncomprehending and incredulous' of feminism. In part both explanations are true, but what Davis' argument conceals is that the implications of feminism have been only too well recognised by the Left. Feminism has been marginalised because of the sexual, social and political threat which it poses.

The threat

This threat can be better understood if we look at the definition of feminism which she offers: 'Feminism indeed can now be described as an alliance around a commitment to end the oppression of women.' On this score, feminism has offered three alternative strategies. Radical feminism argues that oppression is synonymous with patriarchy and that domestic and labour separatism is the only option. By comparison reformist feminism, primarily a politics of accommodation, has argued for the right to work within the orthodox structure, campaigning for parity and equal pay. But the ultimate threat of feminism is derived from the assumption that separatism and accommodation are themselves only intermediary phases. The real demand is a total transformation in what is meant by socialism, the division of wage labour and the definition of gender.

So what feminism has put in crisis is not women's identity and role. Women traditionally have been used to leading double lives and this equally well applies to Tory women. Women have traditionally been strong and capable of fighting for their rights. But feminism is not synonymous with female strength nor equality, and here I would disagree with Davis that it is purely an end to female oppression. Feminism has argued that the price of female liberation is a transformation in what is meant by patriarchy, and ultimately what is meant by masculinity. If women are to reject outmoded social constructions of the feminine, then it follows that the concept of masculinity might also be subject to interrogation and investigation.

Masculinity

It can be seen that feminism is questioning masculinity, precisely at a time when it is already in crisis. Recently, Diverse Productions (C4's Alternative News Feb 1) transmitted a right wing programme on 'Women wedded to the State' and the demise of the family. Men, it was argued, were now peripheral to the domestic situation; little more than studs, they no longer fulfill their traditional role as breadwinner. The programme suggested that the state was creating autonomous queen bees simultaneously emasculating the male species. Looking at current patterns of unemployment with the decimation of traditional forms of male employment, it can be seen that this argument has some credence.

However this erosion of the masculine identity has nothing to do with feminism. Under the conditions of Capital wage labour working class masculinity has historically been managed, defined and constrained by the class system.

Male working class culture is caught in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, Tory ideology promotes the myth of virile masculinity, powerful, indomitable and complete. On the other, it undermines and jeopardises this identity, castrating through unemployment, class antagonism and the humiliation of hierarchies and the division of labour. Class and sexual identity are inseparable. Masculinity, like colour or creed, is managed, fought over and constrained.

In this sense the battle over masculinity is nothing new. However, feminism has further placed gender politics in crisis, demanding that fundamental assumptions be re-examined. So precisely at a time when working class masculinity is rebelling against Tory threats to what it is 'to be a man', feminism, for different reasons, is also critical of what it is 'to be a man'.

I would disagree with Davis' claim that: 'There is no clear evidence to suggest a massive reaction against the ideals of women's liberation.' On the contrary I think the reaction has been phenomenal: resistance cannot be solely measured in terms of escalating sexual and domestic violence. The strategy of patriarchy, which includes the Left, has been one of entrenchment. In a time of crisis when masculinity has become politically pressured from the Right and Left, the reaction has been to reject, ignore and marginalise the feminist argument. The effect of this dismissal has been to trivialise and ghettoise feminism as 'the women's question', thus avoiding confrontation with its broader sexual and political aims. The Left desires to remain untainted by feminism. Frozen in crisis, it confuses the political intention of feminism with right wing sexual management. The Left, as Tricia Davis so cogently put it, remains 'criminally silent'.

ANN SEDLEY
New priorities

There is an increasing recognition among those debating 'Labour's Lost Millions' that the labour movement and parties on the Left must become relevant to women. The point is made with different degrees of emphasis and analysis. Some, unfortunately

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see women just as voting fodder. Robin Cook has argued, in deriding the suggestion that the Labour Party should work with the Alliance, that David Owen has more in common with Margaret Thatcher than Neil Kinnock. In terms of appealing to women in a progressive sense this is not so. The SDP has a very determined policy of winning the women's vote. It also responds to pressures from women within its own Party. Last year, without prompting from outside women's lobbies, it opposed the Government's regulations on equal pay for work of equal value — something the Labour Party did, but was confused about for some time. The SDP also supported the Sex Equality Bill. Again, Labour did as well, but the House was not exactly packed with Labour MPs. They were also criticised for double standards, as feminist policies and demands are not taken seriously within the Party.

The recent articles by Tricia Davis (October MT) and Jean Gardiner (Feb MT) raise many very important points about the relationship between the labour movement and feminism and the dangers of the Left not taking feminist politics seriously. Tricia Davis describes the creeping attack on feminist politics starting with ultra left groups and now taking hold among the sectarian members of the Communist and Labour parties. While it is important that Kinnock should support a progressive family policy and condemn the family wage and while it is extremely important that there is a Labour front bench spokesperson on women's rights, we must be careful that these are not sops to the women's movement, but are turned into policies and action relevant to women. And this must be the difference: where the SDP woos the women's vote, the Left must have a conscious understanding of changing its politics and its organisation so that it reflects the lives of women, is relevant to them and makes them want to be involved. Like Tricia, I think it is important to point out that the Communist Party is the only party on the Left with a programme which includes a commitment to feminism. It recognises that the position of women must be changed under capitalism: it is not enough to wait for the socialist revolution. It says sexism must be combatted and there must be a determined struggle against ingrained prejudices. Why is it then, that even with such ideas in its programme, the CP is not making big strides in gaining support among women?

A male movement

The answer is the same for all left parties and for the labour movement. By history and tradition the labour movement is a male movement. In the past it specifically excluded women, now it marginalises us. Twelve years ago there would be fierce debates about feminist ideas. Now they are often agreed, but no action is taken on them. The theory of male passive resistance has been expounded elsewhere. But what affects women's lives also affects men's. And that is the crux of the matter. If feminist politics are to be taken seriously things are going to change for men. They are going to have to give up the power traditionally seen as theirs at work, in the labour movement, in politics and at home.

Parties on the Left must look at their own organisation, political debate and political activities and change them so that they become relevant to women. Qualities seen as important for leading positions are usually male qualities reflecting a certain sort of political and trade union experience. The experience and qualifications of women must be re-evaluated and upgraded. The experience of women at home with small children; the experience of women in peace camps; the experience of women in their school PTA. In terms of labour movement politics these are not seen as an important part of the class struggle. But in fact they represent key political battles against the actions of this government and the Left is losing out by ignoring this experience.

And the other questions?

If political debate is to become relevant to women, it must become a matter of course to consider how political issues affect women and following on from that, if changes are made, how they will affect men. For instance, the role women play in the mining communities, particularly during industrial action, is something that is raised by the Right to destroy unity but not discussed politically with women and men on the Left. We support the NGA in the struggle against anti-union laws, but do we discuss the fact that some members of the NGA sexually harass women members and make their working life a misery? If a male comrade beats up his wife is that a personal or a political issue for a left party? What policy does the Labour Party and Communist Party have on pornography?

When discussing unemployment, do we look at the fact that part-time workers, most of whom are women, are unfairly and often unlawfully dismissed before full-time workers? Are the political implications of this discussed and taken up in our unions?

Both Tricia and Jean have raised very important questions to do with Thatcherism's appeal to women, particularly through discussing morals and values. They argue that the Left has not taken these questions seriously, in spite of the fact that feminists have tried to introduce them into left debate. While Jean, I think optimistically, says women no longer accept the gender division between breadwinner and housekeeper, Tricia points out that it is the Tories that have addressed themselves to the practical and emotional tensions caused by women's dual role. Jean points out that unemployment has made men and women ask questions about how work is structured in relation to life and responsibilities outside the workplace. It is appalling that it has taken Tory policies to produce this result when feminists have been discussing these issues for years. The feminist alternative economic strategy should be central but it is not, because it makes too many radical proposals that would affect men's lives.

The Conservative Party appeals to women in their traditional role and to women who have 'careers' but still hold 'traditional' values. But even this is changing. The Women's Institute which represents over 300,000 women supported the Sex Equality Bill and was dismayed at the Government's opposition to it. The male Left must not attempt to retrench their position; men need to accept things have changed and are changing. Women have tremendous potential power. If the labour movement does not implement women's politics it will be in danger of divorcing theory from practice and paying the inevitable price.

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Letters

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THE LEFT AND THE MARATHON

I hope never to have to run 26 miles, but Mark Perryman's letter (Feb issue) strikes a welcome chord.

One other form of sport, actively under threat at present, is even more popular than marathon running. I refer to fishing — the green umbrella sort, not your chalk stream gentlemen with tweed hats — which attracts more people each Saturday than does football, and has impeccable working class credentials.

The Anti-Bloodsports League, helped by massive coverage in the capitalist press, have been making quite a stink, highlighting such emotive points as the supposed torturing of fish in catch-nets. Is it too much to hope that the Broad Left will speak with a united voice on this subject, and defend the contemplative afternoons of so many working people?

Unlike marathon runners, fishermen may not be 'activists', but they seem to me equally good political material — 'pacifists' perhaps?

Ron Collins, Melksham

ANNA COOTE'S CHALLENGE

Hooray for Anna Coote. At last someone has the courage to challenge the smugness of the new orthodoxy which has enveloped *Marxism Today* over the last year. So many of the recent articles — dare I say even Hobsbawm's 'Labour's Lost Millions' — have a blandness and level of abstraction which weakens their value to those involved in the increasingly sharp struggles currently being waged down at the grass roots.

As a socialist-feminist I search the pages of MT in vain for ideas and support for anything that relates to my politics. Outside the women's movement publications, where are the left debates on strategies for tackling pornography, around prostitution, reproductive rights, the development of women's committees? We urgently need a discussion on how to begin campaigning on the re-evaluation of skills associated with women's work. I could go on. Debates around racism and black people's politics have also received short shrift. For example, how does the expansion of racism awareness programmes for white workers relate to a strategy of political change which emphasises the role of struggle in challenging the dominant ideology?

It won't be easy to find people willing to write about these issues for the journal given its current format. The length of most articles is daunting for any but the most practiced. Working out new ideas publicly may be better done by a series of shorter pieces around a single theme. Sharpening up the debate will bring more political pressure on the editorial board. They will have to put their faith in new and untried contributors. Perhaps MT could organise some discussions/workshops for people interested in writing for the journal. Unless Anna Coote's challenge is taken up positively, MT is in danger of becoming marginalised from many aspects of progressive politics.

Nathalie Hadjifotiou, London

THE ANTI LABOUR VOTE

I write to the theoretical journal of the C P as a double outsider. I am a former Labour Party member who stood as a Social Democrat at the last election. There is, however, much that I respect and accept in the election analysis by Eric Hobsbawm (October 1983). But, herewith, two fundamental reservations:

Hobsbawm suggests that Thatcherism won because the anti-Thatcher majority was split. Quite the opposite. For the first week on my council estates I thought I was fighting the Labour candidate for the anti-Thatcher vote. Then I discovered that the debate was about where the anti-Labour vote was to go — Tory or SDP. Nobody talked to me about how best to register an anti-Tory vote. The issue was how most effectively to vote anti-Labour. Until this point is recognised — with embarrassing overtones for both the old Left and for the Alliance — the rest of the Hobsbawm analysis falls.

Hobsbawm writes 'We cannot abandon this tradition of being a broad people's party for if Labour . . .' What we? Hobsbawm remains a Communist. In my years in the Labour Party we had to deal with Communists standing against Labour candidates and with Communist attacks on most of the things we did and stood for. Yet he now writes of the Labour Party as being the joint possession of some mysterious we. The Labour Party no more belongs to the CPGB than it does to the SDP and it is as insulting for him as it would be for me to write as if we owned it. Why pretend otherwise?

John Torode, London

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Letters

BUSINESS ALIENATION

As a capitalist businessman with some knowledge and much sympathy for many of the ideas of Marxism I read Bertell Ollman's book (reviewed in *Marxism Today*, January) with much interest. When Ollman ventured from the groves of academe into the world of people doing business he took as his lode stone, he tells us, the maxim that 'honesty is the best policy only when it pays'.

It was therefore hardly surprising that only a few months later, and his friends' inherited wealth and savings nearly exhausted, he was told 'Not only was our credit nil but — according to Parker Ullger, the president of Lanzer — I had a reputation as a "ball buster".'

Notwithstanding the inherent and unavoidable conflicts between ethical responsibility, equity and self interest in capitalism and the world of business; indeed perhaps because of it, the ethos of 'my word is my bond' is still — fortunately — of importance to most people in the day to day conduct of their affairs. It is sadly ironic that one whose academic reputation is based on a study of 'Alienation' should seemingly have learnt so little from his academic studies.

C J Fell, Essex

We welcome your letters for the April issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday 9 March.

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Your chosen specialist subject is 'British Political Parties'. You have 2 minutes, starting from... NOW!

- *'Which party organised the biggest political festival of 1983?'* 'The Communist Party' *'Correct'*
- *'Which was the only party to campaign against the Falklands War?'* 'The Communist Party' *'Correct'*
- *'Which party was described by CND leader Bruce Kent as our "partners in the cause of peace in this world"?'* 'The Communist Party' *'Correct'*
- *'Which party has a tall, dark, handsome, charismatic leader?'* PASS...
- *'Which party publishes, as well as Marxism Today, magazines on the women's movement, economics, young people, health, the countryside and education?'* 'The Communist Party' *'Correct'*
- *'Which party has links with revolutionary and liberation movements worldwide?'* 'The Communist Party' *'Correct'*

SINCE YOU'VE STARTED, WHY NOT FINISH?

I wish to join/wish to know more about The Communist Party/The Young Communist League.
Please send____copies of the party's programme *The British Road to Socialism* (60p inc. postage).

Name_____ Phone_____

Address:_____

Send to: Gordon McLennan, 16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY. Tel: 01-251 4406

'You passed on only one, to which the correct answer is the SDP

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Update

NEWS

Women's Peace Bus A double decker bus funded by the GLC to provide a friendly place for women to see videos, listen to radio tapes and to examine where they stand on peace issues. There is a creche on the top deck. Those interested in using the bus should apply to the Women's Peace Bus Cooperative 52 Acre Lane Brixton SW2 5SP (01 737 4144).

National Poster Competition Launched by Child Poverty Action Group to attract new poster designs which confront popular myths about poverty and the poor in Britain today. Entries are open to art students, professional designers and all those interested in using their creative energies for Britain's poor. Competition runs to April. Details from CPAG 1 Macklin St London WC2 (01 242 9149).

Greenpeace SOS Most people will have heard of the £50,000 fine imposed on Greenpeace for refusing to give an undertaking not to try to plug the Windscale (Sellafield) waste discharge pipe. They hope to raise this from an appeal. Donations should be sent to Greenpeace 30 Graham St London N1 8LL.

CAMPAIGNS

Campaign for a Scottish Assembly A week of activity from the 27 Feb to 3 March to coincide with the 5th anniversary of the fall of the Bill. This includes a symbolic demonstration outside the 'Scottish Assembly' building on Carlton Hill, Edinburgh (1st March 11-12.00) Leaflet ting and activity in Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen and Glasgow (3 March). Programme of events by East Lothian and Dingwall groups. Prof Chris Harvey will also be appearing on 'Comment' on Channel Four on 1 March. Details from Val Marshall 93 Tay St, Newport, Fife (Dundee 542197) or Kerr Yule (Dingwall 64016).

CONFERENCES

Should the law on rape be changed 7 March (Wed). One of a series of 'Living in 1984' meetings looking at individual freedom and rights. 6.30 at the Mary Ward Centre 42 Queen Square London W.C.1.

Science for the Boys 13 March (Tues) What can be done to change it? Speaker from 'Girls into Science and Technology' project. Organised by British Society for Social Responsibility in Science 7.30 Manchester Poly Students Union, Sidney Street, M10.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict and The Arms Race 3 March (Sat) One day conference, speakers include Claudia Wright and Patrick Seale. 10.00am St Catherines College, Oxford.

Trade Unions and the Road to Socialism 4 March (Sun) One day school organised by the West of England District CP. Open to all interested. 11 am at 10 Lawford St, Bristol 2. Details from Ian Jackson (0272 558726).

Teaching African History 7-9 March (Tues, Wed, Thurs) Organised by the Commonwealth Institute and aimed at secondary teachers. Fee £15. Details from Julia Osmond (01 603 4335).

Labour Movement Conference on Ireland 17 March (Sat) Organised by Nottingham Trade Union Council. Speakers from TUC, NCC, Labour Party and Ireland, also workshop sessions. 10-4.00 at Queens Walk Community Centre. Details from Chris Preston (0602 51035).

Patriotism: ideology and myth in the making of English national identity Sat/Sun 10-11 March Oxford: Ruskin, Somerville, Balliol, Queen Elizabeth House. Plenary sessions: Beatrix Campbell, England Now: Anthony Barnett, The Left and Patriotism. Tickets (£6 waged, £3 unwaged) and programme, History Workshop, Ruskin College, Oxford.

History in the Primary School Sat 24 March Carolyn Steedman, the History Curriculum; Sallie Purkis, Oral History etc. Tickets (£4 waged £2 unwaged) and programme, History Workshop Ruskin College, Oxford.

Vietnam—Rice and Literacy, New Victories 24 March (Sat) Conference and AGM of the British Vietnam Association. Main themes are achievement of self sufficiency in rice and the abolition of illiteracy by Vietnam. 9.30-4.30 Caxton Hall, SW1. Fee £2.00 unwaged £1.00. Apply BVA Sec Mrs J Yuille, 52 St Johns Pk, London SE3 (01 858 7930).

Workplace Branch Conference 24-25 March. Organised jointly by the Scottish District and Northern District CP at the Star Club 44 Carlton Place, Glasgow. Details from John Kay (041 429 2558).

EVENTS

Hot Time 1-10 March. A play about the conflicts, passions, comedy and humour of those involved in the 1926 General Strike. Production by Common Stock Theatre and Youth Company with young unemployed people. 8.00 St Pauls Church, Hammersmith London. (01-748 3354) £2.50 unwaged £1.50.

Victor Jara Festival 2 March (Fri) featuring Inti Illimani, Isabel Parra, Santiago Del, Nueve Extremo and Special Guests. Organised by the GLC in association with the Victor Jara Committee at the Royal Festival Hall. Tickets £2.20, 3.30, 4.40, 5.50, 6.50 and 7.50.

Welfare not Warfare 3 March. (Sat). A rally and march in the Rhonda to celebrate St Davids Day. Organised by the Wales CP the theme is 'Defence of the NHS and Peace'. March starts at Llwynypia Hospital at 11.30 am and proceeds via Tonypandy to NUM Club for a rally. Details from Dave Richards (0222 811827).

Horwich Peace Festival 3 March (Sat) Fair and rally with theatre, music and workshops from 2-5.00 pm. Folk concert 8-11 pm. Organised by Horwich CND at the Horwich Leisure Centre, Victoria Road Horwich Greater Manchester.

Privatisation of British Telecom 7-8 March (Wed, Thur). A public hearing at County Hall to assess the likely effects on jobs and the services offered to telephone users in the capital of the proposed privatisation of British Telecom. Organised by the GLC. Details of programme from Slim Halet (01-633 5958).

Clydebank Blitz 1941 10 March (Sat) Commemoration and demo, speakers Joan Ruddock CND Norman Buchan MP, Gavin Strang MP and Ron Todd TGWU plus trade unions, Clydebank councillors, doctors etc. Assemble 12.00 Clydebank.

The Deterrent has worked! Has it? Will it? 22 March (Thur) Hear John Cox answer this question. Also speaker from Greenham and the 'Fall Out' marching band. Organised by Hornsey CND 7.30 Town Hall Crouch End Broadway London.

'VIVA 84' A Dance and Music Benefit for Chile at Sadler's Wells Theatre, on Sun March 18 at 7.30 pm. Featuring the Ballet Rambert, the English Dance Theatre, the Chilean Mime Theatre and Fusion, with Paco Pena to be confirmed. Tickets available from the Sadler's Wells Theatre. Box Office 01-278 8916. Proceeds to Chile Committee for Human Rights.

PUBLICATIONS

Defence Expenditure and Employment This document, debated and endorsed by members of the Civil and Public Servants Union in the Ministry of Defence, argues a detailed case for arms conversion policies. It demonstrates that expenditure on arms if switched to other goods and services could not only protect but increase jobs. Available from SCPS 124/130 Southwark St, London SE1 0TU.

Handbook for Workers Covered By Wages Councils Handbook published by the Low Pay Unit for the 3m low paid workers covered by wages councils. It provides them and their advisers with an 'at a glance' guide to the min rates of pay and other conditions of employment laid down by wages councils. Available from LPU 9 Poland St London W1V 3DO (01-437 1780).

Entries for the April Update should be sent as soon as possible (latest date Friday 9 March) to Maria Loftus, Marxism Today 16 St John Street London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 or 01-607 3344 (evenings).

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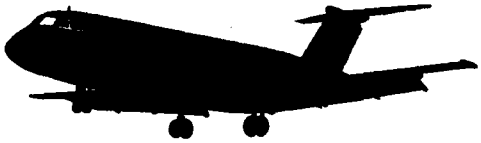

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Nicaragua Easter Tour

New Nicaragua Study Tour 8-24 April 1984. To Managua (4 days), Masaya, Matalya, Esteli, and the English speaking region on the Atlantic coast. Full daily programme of meetings and discussions and visits to co-operatives, political and trade union organisations etc. In association with Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign and New Socialist Magazine. Further tours planned for Easter and summer vacations.

Easter in Cuba

16 days 11-27 April. Comfortable Iberia flights via Madrid. 1 week of visits and meetings in Havana followed by stay on superb beach within reach of the capital — £525. Weekly departures to Cuba from early May, from £499.

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STOP PRESS EASTER AND SPRING 84

Easter education tour to Moscow, Minsk and Leningrad with visits to teacher's unions, schools etc 15-29 April

Art and architecture tour Moscow Vladimir Pskov and Leningrad 15-29 April

Mayday in the USSR 28 April — 4 May, and 28 April — 11 May Moscow, Leningrad and place at the parade

USSR
TRANSIT TO CHINA
April 1st Revised departures by air to Moscow and Irkutsk, then Trans-Siberian train via Ulan Ude and Manchuria to Peking, with range of onward or return travel plans.

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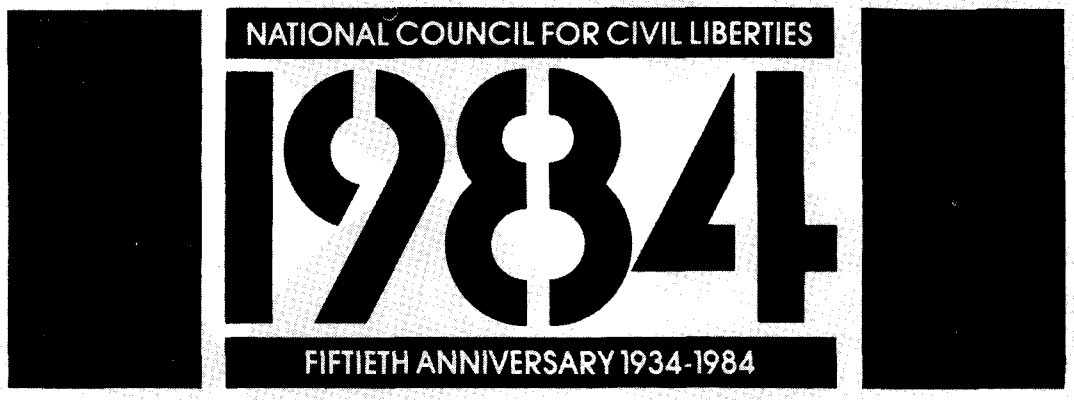

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT. . .

- Government access to medical records
- Supergrasses and plastic bullets
- Increased stop and search powers by the police
- Restrictions on the freedom of the press
- National Insurance Identity cards
- The use of lie detectors at the work place
- Limitations on the right to strike
- THE BAN ON TRADE UNIONS AT CHELTENHAM

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